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THE
PEON PRINCE



ED. ROUTLEDGE & SONS, THE BROADWAY, LUDGATE.

THE PEON PRINCE;

OR,

PUTNAM POMFRET'S MEXICAN FORTUNES.



LONDON :
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CHAPTER I.

THE BRIGANDS AT HOME.

It was the autumn of 1845. The sun was gilding with his retiring beams the tops of that extended reach of mountain steppes, rising one above another from the sea-coast of Mexico, far up to the vast table-land on which its capital is built, and higher still to the eternal snows of regions beyond. The shades of night were stalking like giant phantoms up the sides of precipices, and over the dense forests, and a singular golden mist blended with the brown haze which is the twilight of those climes, and is immediately succeeded by the glorious light and beauty of semi-tropical constellations.

Upon the summit of one of the mountain ridges, overlooking the surrounding country, was situated, at the period of our story, the stronghold of a notorious band of brigands whose name had long been the terror of the neighboring villages, as well as of many unfortunate merchants who transacted the trade between seaboard and inland cities, and who never trusted themselves in the vicinity of the "Outlaw's Mount," as it was called, without a strong guard of soldiers, hired at a heavy price from the Commandant of the nearest garrison. These soldiers, as well as their Commandant, found it, as may easily be imagined, so profitable a business to protect the caravans, that they took little pains to drive the brigands from their fortresses, or attack them by any regular system of warfare. Indeed, so intrenched were the outlaws, and so desperate were they known to be, it would have been a hazardous business to attempt their destruction.

At the present hour, the edge of evening, the brigands' retreat presented a motley appearance. In the midst of a thick growth of wood was a circular "clearing," marked by decayed trunks of trees and huge rocks, in the center of which could be seen the entrance to one of those mountain caves common in the passes of Mexico, used long ago, doubtless, as places of refuge for the hunted children of the soil, when the Spanish conquerors, asserting tyrannic dominion, subjected the hapless aborigines to a cruel servitude. Scattered around, before the cavern mouth, were several groups of men, of wild appearance, clad in a costume half savage and half military.

Each man was armed with a carabine, and a brace of large pistols hung at his belt, from which also depended a short sword or knife, shaped somewhat like the creese of a Malay, and which is the same kind of weapon as that used among the *Ulaneros* of South America, in slaying the wild buffalo on their extensive prairies or *pampas*. A blanket cloak, or *poncho*, was thrown across the shoulders of each, covering a leather jacket, and lower garments of untanned buffalo-hide. It might be difficult to bring together a more ferocious-looking set of fellows in any place save among the mongrel descendants of Spanish buccaneers.

Nevertheless, though ill-looking enough, they appeared at the present time to be enjoying themselves vastly; for, in the midst of the party, upon a rocky shelf, stood a large skin of wine, to which each, as occasion offered, applied his tin canteen, and imbibed with much seeming relish its sparkling contents. All at the same time mingled in a rapid stream of conversation, as if every one was fearful he should not have an opportunity to deliver his opinion.

"Ho, Lopez, a song!" cried a burly fellow, the nearest to the wine-skin, and who appeared, withal, to have already become pretty well acquainted with its contents.

"Not I," returned Lopez, a younger member of the group, who lazily puffed his cigar at the other side of the wine-skin. "Not I, drunken Spaltro; but I'll give you else than a song, if you quit not your winks and nods at Berta yonder."

Saying this, the young man glanced toward a female, quite youthful and handsome, who stood near the group, occupied in filling the cups of those furthest from the wine-skin.

"Ho! ho!" laughed Spaltro, rolling his tongue over his lips contemptuously. You must be jesting, Master Lopez. Come hither, Berta—give me another cup of wine with your pretty fingers, and then a kiss, to sweeten the wine, my girl. Let us see if Don Lopez will keep his threat."

"You shall have no wine from my fingers, Spaltro," cried the young girl, gayly. "And as for a kiss, you are too old and ugly even to expect such luxuries."

This sally of the girl was received with a loud laugh by those who heard it, except by Spaltro himself; who staggered to his feet, and muttering, "Ah, we shall see," endeavored to lay hold upon the handsome cup-bearer. But the damsel dextrously eluded him.

"Aha, we shall see all about that," continued Spaltro, tipsily pursuing the girl. "Come here, little child! *Diablo!* how fast it runs!"

"Pester not the child, Spaltro," roared Lopez. "Do we not all know she hates you?"

"I'll pester you, braggart Lopez, if you hold not your peace. Stand aside, till I have a kiss from the girl."

"Aha, you think, old comrade, to get what our Berta has never given to one of us young and handsome gallants. Be off, else my musket-stock shall remind your weak head of its vanity."

But the intoxicated brigand took little heed of the threats and abuse of his young comrade. He staggered forward, and would probably have reached the young girl, had not Lopez suddenly thrown out the stock of his carabine, which, entangling Spaltro's feet, brought him sprawling to the ground.

"Lie you there, illustrious Spaltro," said Lopez, while the rest set up a vociferous shout that enraged the discomfited ruffian to the last degree.

"By St. Dominic!" he yelled, rising to his feet, with a murderous gleam in his bloodshot eye, "you shall die for that insult, Lopez!"

And, raising his carabine to his shoulder, he took deliberate aim at his laughing antagonist.

But the girl Berta crept softly up behind him, and slyly emptied a cup of wine upon the priming of the leveled gun.

"Fire away, valiant Spaltro," cried Lopez, with a laugh of derision; for he had noticed Berta's maneuver.

Spaltro dropped his carabine.

"Ten thousand devils!" roared he. "But *this* shall do the business!"

Drawing his knife, he rushed toward Lopez, who now, in turn, presented the muzzle of his own piece.

At this moment, a quick footstep was heard, and a tall figure suddenly emerged from the cave. A whisper ran around the group:

"It is the Captain!"

The "Captain" was a terrible-looking fellow. He had an eye like that of a hawk, and long, snaky locks hung over his shoulders. At this time, he wore a dark frown upon his forehead.

"What means this quarrel?" was his first exclamation, as, advancing into the center of the group, his quick eye caught the aspect of affairs. "Are ye about to cut your throats as soon as your leader's back is turned, comrades? Have a care, or my hand will do the cutting for you. Speak! Spaltro—Lopez—what do you mean?"

"He insulted me!" muttered Spaltro, in a sullen voice.

"That's a lie!" cried Lopez.

"Silence! both of you!" thundered the Captain. "No more quarrels—but shake hands!"

"Not I," said Spaltro.

"Nor I, by St. Juan!" muttered Lopez.

"By St. Juan, but you shall!" cried the robber Captain, drawing a pistol from his belt. He then motioned to the young girl who had been the innocent cause of the dispute.

"Berta," said he, "bring me a cup of wine."

The damsel silently obeyed, while the band regarded their Captain with anxious looks.

"Now mark me, *comrades*," continued the brigand leader, fixing his fierce glance upon the two malcontents, and lifting to his lips the cup of wine. "You will not shake hands. *Muy bueno!* Nevertheless, if you do *not* shake hands before I shall have swallowed the wine—*valgame Dios!* you both die! Do you understand me?"

So saying, the brigand chief placed the cup to his lips, and turning his head away, began slowly to drink.

Spaltro cast a savage look at his Captain, and clenched his

teeth together in sullen determination. Lopez moved not from his position, his back being turned to his antagonist, though it was apparent that the young bandit understood his leader's command as one not to be trifled with, for his ruddy complexion became at once deadly pale.

"The business is serious, for our Captain will certainly keep his word," muttered Lopez to himself, half turning his head to catch a glimpse of his adversary. Spaltro's brow was knit gloomily, and his eyes bent to the ground, but he made no movement of reconciliation. "I'll die," cried Lopez, "before I give my hand *first!*"

The Captain continued to drink his wine slowly, and the young girl watched his face with a fearful interest, while the band gathered in a semicircle around. The last drop was at length drained from the cup, and the brigand chief removed it from his lips.

"Have ye done it?" he cried, dashing the goblet to the ground, and cocking his pistol with a sharp click. He turned about, as he spoke, toward the men, and beheld the sullen Spaltro preserving the same dogged demeanor which he had at the outset assumed. It was but one instant that he saw this, for in the next his pistol was discharged, and Spaltro, leaping from his feet, fell a corpse upon the ground.

The whole band uttered a cry of horror, for not one of them had believed that their leader would proceed to this extremity. But the Captain gazed around the circle with a fierce expression, and shouted to the remaining rebel:

"Lopez! kneel down!"

Lopez, trembling like a child, looked from the body of his late antagonist to the faces of his shuddering companions. He read in their white cheeks the horror which their leader's act inspired, and he half resolved to call upon them to avenge their comrade. Had he acted upon this impulse, and boldly confronted the Captain, the spell of terror might have been broken at once; but he hesitated, and the next instant his eye was transfixed and ruled by the mastering glance of his chief.

"Lopez! kneel down!"

The young robber knelt, and the Captain drew another pistol from his belt, while not a movement was heard among the surrounding brigands. Again the sharp click of a lock sounded ~~fearfully distinct~~.

But this time the deadly report did not follow; for, as the muzzle of the weapon pointed at the heart of the youth, the Captain's arm was suddenly arrested, and Berta, the young girl, flung herself at his feet.

"Oh, spare him!" she shrieked.

Her beautiful olive face was thrown backward, her long black hair streaming wildly to the ground. Tears gushed from her eyes, and her lips were parted in agonized entreaty. The Captain paused, and a low murmur ran through the band.

"What say you—has he not merited death?" asked the chief, in a tone so fierce and haughty that the foremost of the murmuring group sunk back. "Speak! am I your chief, or not?"

Every man was silent; not one pleaded for his comrade's life.

"No, no! he shall not die—no, no!" murmured the young Berta, still clinging to the arm of the stern brigand.

"Lopez! do you hear? Our comrades are willing that you should die, like Spaltro, rather than discipline be lost in the band which I command. Is it not so, *amigos*?" he continued, turning to the crowd around.

A low assent came from the robbers.

"It is well. You hear, Lopez—your life is justly forfeited! Only one pleads for you—the poor little Berta. Nevertheless, I shall grant Berta's request. Your life is spared. Go, comrade, and let us have no more quarreling!"

Lopez arose from his knees like one who had seen a spirit, so pale and ghastly were his features. The Captain turned toward the rest, and called:

"Pedro!"

A young brigand sprung promptly forward.

"Pedro, you are cunning and vigilant. I have business for you. To-night, comrades, we shall have booty."

"*Viva Marani!*" shouted the band, rejoiced at this intelligence, and already forgetful of the slain Spaltro.

"To-night I will lead you on a rich enterprise. We shall attack the house of Murillo the Rich. Pedro, go at once, disguise yourself well, and reconnoitre the whole farm. Learn if there be suspicious afloat, and bring me tidings ere the moon scales the 'Outlaw's Mount.' You understand me, comrade?"

"Am I to enter the house?"

"If possible."

"I will go, then, Captain, as a wandering minstrel. We have an excellent bandolin in the cave, that belonged to a poor devil of an actor whom we shot in our attack on the Vera Cruz caravan. With such an instrument, noble Captain, doubtless I can charm Murillo's household."

"Be wary, Pedro, and lose no time. Ere the moon climbs yonder tree-tops, we must march."

Pedro seized his carabine, and disappeared within the cavern, to prepare for the enterprise, while the chief, advancing to the wine-skin, filled a cup of the red liquor.

"Comrades," cried he, "pledge me this toast: To the wine-casks and coffers of Murillo the Rich!"

"Bravo! bravo! long live our noble Captain!" shouted the brigands. "Long live the brave Marani!"

And, filling anew their cups, they drank to the health of their chief, while at their feet lay the stark corpse of Spaltro their comrade.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AND DAGGERS.

INEZ MURILLO, only daughter of the rich farmer whose house is to be attacked, was one of the handsomest maidens of the whole valley.

She had black, velvet-looking eyes, and a complexion of that rich olive which imparts such a luxurious appearance to the Southern women. Her hair, glossy and jetty, was always braided most bewitchingly, and many a lover sighed to possess only one little lock of it. In truth, Inez was a charming creature, and it is no wonder at all that she turned the heads of half the valley youths.

Besides all this, Inez was an heiress, and the immense droves of cattle, broad meadows and well-filled money-bags of Murillo the Rich, were no small items in the schedule of the maiden's attractions.

It may well be believed, then, that Inez had no lack of suitors. But the most prominent among those who aspired to the hand and fortune of Murillo's daughter, were two individuals, whose demeanor and attractions threw their more rustic rivals in the shade. One of these, named Antonio La Vega, was an officer of cavalry, whose regiment was stationed at a post about a couple of leagues distant. And the other was a stranger, who had resided but a few months in the vicinity, but who appeared to be a man of immense wealth, and extremely liberal. He had purchased a house from Murillo, and resided in it, with one servant and an old house-keeper.

Both of these suitors of Inez were elegant men, with good features and graceful manners. La Vega always wore a dashing uniform, and rode a magnificent horse, which, when the cavalier dismounted at Murillo's gate, was generally covered with foam. Don Martino, the other lover, was a tall, majestic-looking man, with long, curling locks, and a shining moustache, over his lip. Both of them had very white teeth, and flashing black eyes.

But, in spite of the fascinations possessed by these two cavaliers, Señorita Inez did not *love* either of them; and, though she was somewhat of a coquette, and liked very well to receive the admiration and attentions of both, she never for once thought seriously of marriage. So, though her father often talked to her of Antonio's rank, and Martino's riches, she continued to rattle away with each of them, never allowing an opportunity for a serious declaration of passion.

In fact, (gentle reader we will let you into a secret, as you are sure to find it out, if you read on), the Señorita was in love with somebody else. She did not know it herself, and perhaps she would not have believed any one who should tell her of it; nevertheless, it is true, she was in love with Lorenzo the artist.

Ah! who was Lorenzo the artist?

Nobody indeed, nobody! A poor youth, "nothing but an artist," as Inez used to whisper to herself, who spent his time in making pictures all over the valley, and writing sonnets and madrigals. How could it be possible that the daughter of the rich Murillo should ever think of so humble a youth!

To be sure, Lorenzo was very handsome, and every body said that he knew a great deal, though the villagers generally agreed that his learning would not get him a living. He had large, expressive eyes, with long lashes, and dark, flowing ringlets, glossy as those of Inez herself. He possessed a rich voice, and it was delicious to hear him sing his own songs, in the still night, to the accompaniment of a guitar. In spite of herself, Inez acknowledged that she could not help *liking* Lorenzo, but as for love—

This was the state of affairs at the time to which our present chapter returns ; that is to say, three days previous to the night on which the attack was to be made by the brigands on old Murillo's house.

Captain Antonio La Vega had just dismounted at Murillo's gate, as usual leaving his steed in a foam, and Inez was preparing herself to listen to his customary flatteries—in fact, the young officer was about taking the maiden's hand, and seating himself by her side, beneath the vine-covered porch, when, at such an unlucky moment, Don Martino appeared likewise at the gate.

Now, as the reader doubtless suspects, these two rivals were not on the best terms. They never met without exchanging frowns and flashing glances. Now, Martino had to bite his lips to keep from uttering a savage oath.

"Come, come, Señors," cried Inez, gayly, when she perceived how tempestuous her admirers were getting, "do not frighten one with such terrible looks. Listen to me ; I wish you both to be friends."

So saying, she tapped Antonio's cheek with her fan.

"I have nothing to say to men in *livery*," said Martino, glancing scornfully at the brilliant uniform which La Vega wore.

The officer sprang instantly to his feet.

"What do you mean, villain?" he cried, grasping his sword-hilt.

"Villain to your teeth !" returned Don Martino, fiercely.

"Ha ! what say you ?" exclaimed the soldier.

And, drawing his sword, he made a lunge at Martino, which would probably have been fatal had not the blow been suddenly arrested by a new-comer.

This was no other than Lorenzo, the young artist, who had reached the gate just in time to hear the last words of La Vega, and behold him make the pass at Martino. The youth had dextrously interposed his guitar, which hung from his neck by a ribbon, and thus caught and turned aside the officer's weapon, not, however, without every string of the instrument being snapped asunder.

"*Diablo!*" muttered La Vega. "Out, peasant!"

He endeavoured, as he spoke, to strike the young artist, but the hand of Inez stayed his arm.

"Señor," she said, calmly, "you forget yourself, somewhat. Sheathe your sword."

"Not till I chastise this insolent," cried Antonio.

"Coward!" muttered Don Martino, with a low laugh, "I am unarmed, you perceive. You are brave, like the rest of your mongrel soldiers."

"We shall meet again," said La Vega.

Then, turning abruptly toward the artist:

"How dared you, base peasant, arrest my sword?" he cried, with a half-suppressed oath.

"To prevent you, Señor, from disgracing your profession by slaying an unarmed man," replied Lorenzo, returning the other's fierce look with an undaunted gaze.

"You must be taught a lesson," said the officer, advancing toward the youth.

But Inez Murillo stepped quickly between them. She looked steadily first at La Vega and then at Don Martino, which last gentleman stood leaning against the gate, with his arms folded, and a curious smile on his dark lips.

"Listen, Señors," said the daughter of Murillo, in a clear voice. "You have both disgraced yourselves this day. Ay, disgraced yourselves!" she continued, drawing up her beautiful form with a queenly motion, as she noticed the angry glances, "and henceforth I will not receive the attentions of either of you. You have both, I perceive, bad and unruly passions, and I can never love such men."

"But hear me!" cried La Vega.

"Señorita," began Martino.

"I have spoken my decision," said the maiden, firmly. "I henceforth desire not the friendship of either of you!"

And taking the arm of Lorenzo the artist, who had silently, but secretly well pleased, listened to her words, Inez entered the cottage.

La Vega cast a furious glance at Martino, and dashing rudely by him, sprung into his saddle.

"You shall hear from me again!" he cried.

"With all my heart, soldier!" replied Martino.

La Vega galloped away, and for a few moments Don Martino remained standing at the gate. Then he advanced a step, as if to follow the Señorita; but, checking himself, turned slowly from the cottage.

"The proud girl!" he muttered. "I will teach her what it is to insult *me*. We shall be even yet!"

So saying, he directed his steps toward the house which was his residence, about a mile from Murillo's dwelling. Arrived there, he immediately summoned his servant.

"Pedro," said he to him, "we must be moving; we have been idle long enough."

"St. Juan be praised, Captain!" answered Pedro. "I'm heartily tired of this life."

"We leave the valley to-night, and to-morrow I shall be myself again."

"And how goes the wooing, noble Captain?"

"Of that I shall myself take care," answered the master, with a frown, which seemed at once to repress all curiosity in the servant. "Say no more now," continued Don Martino, "but make ready for our departure."

"As you say, noble Captain," returned Pedro.

Early the next morning, a challenge to mortal combat from Captain Antonio La Vega to Don Martino reached the house of the latter. But the messenger was informed by the old housekeeper that her master and his servant had left for a journey, and that she knew not when they would return.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE'S STRATAGEMS.

WHEN Captain Antonio La Vega rode away from the house of Murillo, his bosom burned with the most violent passions, among which hatred of Don Martino (or, as the reader now knows, Marani,) was perhaps the strongest. The contemptuous dismissal which he had received from the Señorita Inez, coupled with jealousy of his rival, lashed his spirit to a pitch of fury. He conceived that Inez favored Martino, and that her angry words to him were but a cloak to hide her interest.

"He is with her now, doubtless," muttered the soldier. "Fool that I was to give way so easily!"

Checking the speed of his horse, he half turned to retrace his course. But a moment's reflection satisfied him that to return would be useless; for, if the Señorita had really deceived him, he knew it would be vain to attempt a renewal of his suit.

"I will have my revenge, nevertheless!" he cried, with a deep oath. "By San Pedro, this proud girl shall rue her scorn! And Martino—he shall never live to triumph over me!"

When La Vega arrived at this conclusion, he had likewise reached the barracks where the soldiers under his command were stationed. Dismounting, he immediately sought a brother officer with whom he was on terms of close intimacy.

Don Ferrardo Nunez was another Captain, serving in the same regiment with La Vega. They had long known each other, and though their characters were very dissimilar, were united in the firmest friendship. La Vega was passionate and revengeful, and, where his interest or pleasure were concerned, he stopped at nothing to obtain his objects.

Nunez, on the contrary, was a good-humored, careless soldier, fond of excitement, and reckless of danger. He liked his brother officer, because he knew him to be brave, and he never paused to enquire whether La Vega was depraved or wicked. Antonio, with a penetrating mind and unscrupulous

conscience, never failed to use his friend whenever he needed him ; and as Nunez generally seconded his wishes, he had begun to consider the latter as much in the light of a tool as a companion.

On the present occasion, La Vega resolved to engage his brother soldier in a scheme to obtain revenge for himself upon those who had insulted him ; and for this purpose he proceeded at once to the quarters of Nunez. He found the Captain discussing a bottle of wine, and throwing himself upon a chair, he poured out a goblet of the liquor, and swallowed it at a draught.

"Well, Antonio," said Nunez, "how speeds your suit with the fair Inez?"

"The devil take her!" cried La Vega, replacing the goblet with violence on the table.

"*Valgame Dios!* What! A quarrel, comrade?"

"You shall hear," replied La Vega.

And he proceeded to speak of his adventure at the farmhouse, the particulars of which were related in the last chapter.

"And what do you intend?" asked Nunez, when La Vega had concluded his recital.

"Intend?" cried Antonio. "To revenge myself upon the whole brood. What else should I do! The girl shall repent her treatment to me, and sue for my forgiveness; and as for that scoundrel, Martino, and the base peasant-boy who had the boldness to stay my arm, by San Pedro, they shall both die!"

"I think, *amigo*, you ought to be thankful to that 'base' peasant, as you style him, inasmuch as he prevented what, to my mind, is a grievous sin—the slaying of an unarmed man."

"By heaven! what are you saying?" cried La Vega, impatiently. "You are repeating the slave's own words."

"I am right, for all that," returned Nunez; "and so you will say, after reflection. For my part, Antonio, I think the youth showed very much like a gentleman, in meeting your sword with his fiddle."

"*Diablos!* do you desire to drive me mad? I come to you for assistance, and here you take part with my enemies."

"Nay, Antonio! Not only do I not side with your enemies, but, by the bones of Cortez, if you tell me to take your quarrel on myself, there's my hand, comrade!"

"I fight my own battles," said La Vega, coldly.

"Then by St. Iago—fight Don Martino forthwith, *amigo*, and we shall have you in good-humor again. Come, send a cartel at once, and when you've run him through the body, like a gentleman, go and make your own peace with Murillo's daughter! What say you, comrade?"

"That your counsel agrees with my purpose. To-morrow you shall ride over to this Don Martino Diablos, and bear him my mortal hatred."

"Enough, *amigo*," said Nunez. "Let us consider the business settled, and I beg you will fill up your glass."

So, next morning, betimes, Don Ferrardo Nunez mounted his horse, and galloped down the valley road to its other extremity, where was situated the old mansion within which he expected to meet Don Martino. But, as we have seen, the cavalier who bore that name was not to be found, having departed suddenly, with his servant. Nunez, therefore, was obliged to rejoin his brother officer, without accomplishing the object of his morning ride; and La Vega, boiling with rage, which vented itself in curses, became so unreasonable as to reach the verge of a quarrel with his friend. But Don Ferrardo preserved his good temper.

"Come, Antonio, this can not be helped," cried the frank soldier. "I shall not run you through for this Martino, who will, it is likely, return to the valley ere long. As for yourself, you are a poor lover if you do not improve your rival's absence, by pressing your suit to the maiden."

"Maledictions on him!" muttered La Vega. "But, as you say, Ferrardo, the maiden—"

"Ah! the maiden," rejoined Nunez. "Now that this truculent fellow, Martino, is out of the way, you can find no difficulties in that quarter, *amigo*!"

"I'm not so sure of it," cried La Vega, moodily; "though I'll wager my life that she loves me—that is to say, she would love me if we were wedded."

"And why not wed at once, *amigo*?"

"Very good talk, if there was not an old Murillo the Rich in one's way."

"In one's way, say you? Since how long have money-bags been in a poor cavalier's way, comrade?"

"I tell you, Nunez, you know nothing about my affairs."

"Tis your own fault, then, comrade. Why do you not tell me? Am I not your sworn friend?"

"Ah!" cried La Vega, with a crafty glance at his comrade's honest face; if one could depend on a friend to stand by one—

"By the bones of Cortez—"

"Through fire and water—"

"Give the word, comrade. What do you want?"

"By St. Pedro! I want Murillo's daughter?" replied La Vega. "And if Don Ferrardo Nunez will stand by me—"

"By the bones—"

"I'll carry her off and marry her in spite of a hundred fathers!"

"Bravo!" cried Nunez, jumping up and oversetting his camp-stool. "That's spoken like a Cid, and I'm your comrade against old Murillo and his money-bags. You shall have her, *amigo*, and Padre Forvaso can tie the knot here in our barracks, in spite of—"

La Vega smiled grimly, as he returned the warm grasp of his comrade's hand. "I shall count on you, Ferrardo."

"As yourself, by St. Juan! And now, *amigo*, when shall it be done?"

"To-morrow night. We will detach a party, under pretense of scouring the mountains for brigands. At midnight, we can descend upon the valley, surround Murillo's house, and —"

"The Señorita—she will be prepared—"

"I shall provide for that! If the household become alarmed, you and our men must cover our flight."

"But, should the Señorita get frightened?"

"Leave the Señorita to me, Nunez. We shall understand one another. And remember—strict secrecy!"

"Oh! you may depend upon me, comrade. To-morrow night you shall win your bride, in spite of old Money-bags!"

"To-morrow night, Ferrardo."

CHAPTER IV.

PUTNAM POMFRET AND THE GREASERS.

WHILE the incidents related in the first chapter of our story were transpiring, there might have been observed, on a road which wound through the valley that skirted the "Outlaw's Mount," a pedestrian, whose habiliments were an odd mixture of garments, which bespoke a stranger in those parts. To a tall person, at least six feet as he strode, some ten inches of beaver hat gave additional altitude; while shrunk white breeches, and a swallow-tailed blue cloth coat, disputed with a yellow *poncho* and crimson scarf, the honor of indicating his nationality, so far as that might be done by costume. The man's face was browned by the sun; his eyes were black and sparkling, like any Mexican *hombre*; but, there was in his face an expression of humor and shrewdness, mingled with entire self-reliance, which marked its possessor as belonging to a more northern section of the American continent. In fact, reader, our pedestrian was a *Yankee*, which means in every foreign land, some offshoot of that great Anglo-Saxon stock, whose footsteps track the paths of empire from the pine woods of Aroostook to California *cañons*; from the wild swash of icy seas upon Labrador's beaches, to the swell of undulating waves in Pacific harbors.

Twilight was deepening into dusk in the more thickly-wooded bottoms, though sufficient day yet lingered to afford a clear perception of surrounding objects to the wayfarer's eyes, which appeared to keep a sharp look-out on either side: for this valley-road was lonesome and devious, though on a direct course to the neighboring city. Tall trees overhung the footpath, and stretched back into the forest, amidst whose somber shadows brooded a sepulchral silence.

"Well," soliloquized the solitary wayfarer, as he pursued his path with measured strides, "I'll be dod-rotted if I ain't gettin' tired o' this 'ere walkin' Spanish cross-lots! I reckon it'll pay to speculate a trifle in mule-flesh, ef I kin find a critter to suit, at the next tavern. Kerryin' a heavy sachel is

mighty independent, but I'll allow it's rayther inconvenient." So saying, the speaker shifted a leather portmanteau from one hand to the other, at the same time pausing to wipe his forehead with a red bandanna handkerchief.

"This 'ere beats natur' for a country" continued the pedestrian, proceeding to solace himself with a morsel of Jamestown tobacco, which he cut from a long plug with a formidable-looking jackknife. "Who'd thought o' Putnam Pomfret, from Varmount, ever toting his traps over a Mexican turnpike? I would'nt mind the blamed thing so much; ef there was a white critter to talk to 'casionally; but, this 'ere circumnavigation all alone by oneself, day in and day out, ain't what I reckoned on. *Course*, there's plenty o' greasers and yaller-jackets; but who wants to be jabberin' with *sich* heathen? They laff rite in a feller's face, if he talks o' railroads; and, as for 'lectric telegraphs or locomotives, I guess they'd as soon believe in harnessing chain-lightnin' to their old go-carts. Hullo, hossfly! where'd *you* come from?"

This sudden exclamation was elicited by the abrupt appearance of a man muffled in a long brown cloak, who carried an oblong box, which evidently was some species of musical instrument; for, as the individual advanced along the road, he was engaged in turning a crank and producing a series of harsh sounds to the burden of a song which he was chanting. This personage was no other than Pedro, with whom the reader is already acquainted, and who had been dispatched by his chief, an hour before, to reconnoitre the house of Murillo the Rich. The young brigand was now upon that errand, disguised as a wandering musician, and carrying a hurdy-gurdy, as he perambulated the valley-road.

Our North American, having delivered himself of the ejaculation, took the liberty of staring fixedly at the newcomer, who, it may be thought, was in no humor to be closely inspected. The latter, indeed, stopped short in his musical performance, and placed his hand upon the hilt of a poniard which peeped from his mantle.

"Hullo, greaser! ye mean mischief, do you?" demanded the Yankee, without changing his position. He said this in English, and then uttered a few words of colloquial *patois*, which, though execrable Spanish, seemed to be intelligible to the disguised brigand.

"*Brévos salude! Señor! yo amigo! Qui es usted?*" was the salutation of Putnam Pomfret, wherewith he intended to assure the Mexican of his own peaceful intentions, and learn if they were reciprocated; but the brigand only responded, gruffly, "*Dod collé!*" being his vernacular for "Let me pass!"

"You do! you can't, Dod Kelly! you derved yaller-skin!" exclaimed Pomfret, swinging his portmanteau from right to left: a movement which evidently alarmed the mock musician, for, in an instant, his poniard-blade gleamed in the dusk, and was thrust at the other with the evident intention of transfixing him as he stood.

"*Thunder!* is that your gait, ye skulkin' cut-throat?" cried the Yankee; and, in another second, he drew a stout club from under his *poncho*, and dealt a quick blow upon the robber's arm, which knocked the knife from his clenched fingers. Then, before Pedro could possess himself of another weapon, our adventurer sprung forward like a panther, and with a single blow of his fist leveled his antagonist to the earth. This done, he pressed his knee upon the breast of the prostrate ruffian, who began to roar lustily.

"Oh, ye'll sing out, ye sarpint, will ye!" exclaimed Pomfret, seating himself deliberately upon the discomfited Mexican. "But I callate you won't try to come Paddy over a live white man from the States. Now, get up, you miserable critter, and let's see how you kin measure sile, or, by thunder! ye'll wake snaix, sure as my name's Put Pomfret!"

Saying this, in a compound of Mexican *patois* and Green Mountain slang, that might have bewildered the most abstruse polyglot of the French Academy, our free American permitted his adversary to regain his feet. Then, pressing the muzzle of a brass-barreled pistol at the robber's breast, he gave the word of command:

"Eyes right, Ingen! for-r-a-r-d—march!"

Pedro uttered a yell of rage and terror, as he took to his heels, leaping from the roadside into the adjacent forest with the agility of a catamount; while Putnam Pomfret, satisfied with his exploit, proceeded, with somewhat hurried steps, along the dusky highway.

Our North American was as genuine a sample of that loco-

most motive portion of the human race yeapt "Yankees," as can possibly be imagined. He had, from an early period of life, been his "own master," or, as the poet more loftily expresses it, "lord of himself," and had improved the possession by conveying it to divers portions of the hospitable globe. Leaving in boyhood his native "Varmount," and with it the guidance of a plow and the intimacy of "Broad and Bright," his favorite oxen, he essayed his first adventure as cabin-boy of a fishing-smack, bound for the "Bay of Chaleur." Thence, after achieving distinction in the mackerel line, his ambition had led him to hunt Leviathan in a whale-ship: and finally, after various experiences in distant lands, a score of hardships and dangers in the wilds of his own country, as pioneer and hunter, he had "turned up," about six months previous to the opening of our story, on the road from Hartford, Connecticut, conveying a load of patent clocks to New York with the object of shipping them on speculation to Vera Cruz. Afterward, desirous of "seeing' more o' the world," he had become his own supercargo, and accompanied his "ventur" to its port of destination. Arrived there, and realizing a "smart profit" on his investment in *time*, he had concluded to occupy his leisure till the homeward departure of his vessel in viewing the country, and enjoying a "fishin' season."

Unfortunately, however, after a fortnight's ramble among the mountains had sufficiently gratified his piscatorial propensities, our hero returned to the seaboard just in time to find that the "Sally Ann" had sailed for the United States, carrying with her his entire "traps" and "plunder," and leaving him a "Yankee adrift," with light pockets and boundless leisure.

So, after remaining in Vera Cruz a sufficient length of time to enable him to pick up a smattering knowledge of the Spanish language, he resolved to travel inland, and was at this time on the road to Mexico, where he "calculated" he should meet with a "smart chance o' making a spec."

The stars were now shooting into the sky in quick succession, changing the grey gloom to brightness, save where the overhanging foliage wrapped the road in duskiness; and Putman continued his course, sometimes whistling or humming a tune, sometimes cogitating with a profound countenance, till he arrived at a spot where the thick forest was suddenly

broken, and an open space of about thirty rods appeared. On one side of the narrow road at this place was a mountain cataract, which came tumbling down the rocks, and, emptying into a gully, formed a turbid stream across the road, spanned by a rude bridge of two or three parallel logs. Here he paused and looked around.

The day had quite vanished, and now the moon was rising in unclouded splendor, silvering the tree-tops, and flashing upon the swollen stream and waterfall. All around was still, save only the sound of the trembling cataract, and there was a lonesomeness about the whole scene that inspired in our hero's mind a feeling of vague uneasiness. However, after a rapid glance, Putnam kept on with a light step, and was proceeding to cross the rustic bridge, when suddenly the sound of voices caught his ear. He drew back within the shadow of the wood, and then peered cautiously out.

At first, the Yankee could distinguish nothing ; but soon, casting his glances sharply across the bridge, he discovered the figures of two men, with guns in their hands, standing in the shadow of the wood, apparently engaged in earnest conversation. Another look sufficed to convince him that one of the two was the pretended musician who had attempted to stab him. The instrument was still in Pedro's belt, but he was now armed with a carabine, the bright barrel of which rested against his arm. In fact, the brigand, after his encounter with the Yankee, had fallen in with another of the band, sent out, like himself, as a scout, and the two were now together in conference—Pedro's companion being no other than the brigand Lopez.

Pedro had just finished the narration of a fierce conflict which he averred had taken place between himself and a band of strangers, and Putnam Pomfret soon contrived to comprehend some portions of the conversation.

"Where, think you, comrade, the scoundrels are now?" asked Pedro's companion.

"Concealed somewhere in the forest," replied Pedro. "You must have seen them had they passed the bridge, Lopez."

"Ay, by San Juan ! For here have I been waiting, by our Captain's orders, to intercept you, for intelligence. But how many attacked you ?"

"A half-score, I am sure," avowed the robber. "I had settled some of them had I carried my trusty carabine."

"What a liar!" muttered Putnam Pomfret to himself.

"What sort of a fellow was their Captain, Pedro?"

"A ferocious, powerful devil of a foreigner!" answered Pedro. "He was armed at all points, and a giant in strength, or he'd have bit the dust, you may be sure."

Putnam Pomfret, on hearing this description of himself, was forced to bite his lips to keep down his laughter.

"Twere well to advise our Captain concerning such dangerous strangers in the forest. You know we've important business on hand to-night," said Pedro.

"You may well say so, Pedro; and we shall all be the richer for it."

"Ay!" returned Pedro, "and 'tis you, Lopez, who are particularly lucky in being alive to share the spoils, instead of lying, as you might be this moment, with that drunken fool, Spaltro."

Lopez shuddered, and wiped his forehead.

"Twas a hard thing, Pedro, to kill a comrade in cold blood. But, doubtless, that seems to you all right, as 'tis said you're the Captain's right-hand man."

"'Tis true, Señor Lopez; I am somewhat in Don Marani's confidence, as you say. Hence, I know, what I tell you, that to-night's work, if it turn out right, will make us all rich men."

"And the Captain leads—himself?"

"You may be sure of that."

"Then we shall have hot work, doubtless. But speak, Pedro; since you knew all about the Captain's plans, there's no harm in giving one a little hint as to where we're going. Eh, comrade?"

"Certainly not, Lopez. You shall hear all about it," replied Pedro, confidentially. "But first let me wet my throat with the contents of that flask which I see peeping from your jacket."

Lopez drew a wine-bottle from his doublet and handed it to his comrade, who imbibed a generous draught.

Putnam Pomfret, watching the pair with anxious eyes, leaned forward from the woody shadows, seeking to glean as

much of the secret which was about to be imparted as his imperfect knowledge of the *patois* in which the robbers were confabulating might permit.

"Now, Lopez, *amigo*," began Pedro, returning the flask to his companion, "I'll wager you a skin of better liquor than this that you can not guess what the Captain and myself have been about for three months past."

"How should I?" demanded Lopez. "Here have we all been kicking our heels against the rocks, awaiting your motions, without sport enough to keep our daggers from rusting, by St. Juan!"

"Well, wait a bit, my man. Sport comes in good time. You must know, comrade, the Captain and myself have been playing at *hidalgo*, and courting a Señorita."

"Both of you, eh?"

"No, comrade! Our Captain did the knight and I his squire, you must know. And whom, think you, was the lady-love, Lopez? Truly, no other but Señorita Inez, the daughter of Murillo."

"Murillo the Rich—whose house—"

"We are to attack this night, Lopez."

"Aha! So our Captain got tired of courting in peaceful style, and now intends to take the Señorita in true brigand fashion—that is, by storm, comrade?"

"Ah, Lopez! we've been laying siege to the garrison for three months, as I said! and just as it seemed to me we were getting ready for conquest—*presto*—here we are—and—"

"Well, comrade," said Lopez, as Pedro stopped abruptly.

"Did you not hear a rustling yonder?"

The two bravos listened, while Pomfret held his breath. Then Pedro's voice resumed the conversation.

"Unfortunately there was a quarrel, and Don Martino—"

"Don Martino—and pray, who was he?"

"Why, our Captain, of course—the noble Marani. You perceive, comrade, he was passing for a *hidalgo*—"

"Ah—a *hidalgo*! So there was a quarrel, you say?"

"Yes; and we left suddenly and rejoined the hills. But to-night, comrade, we are to attack the house, for our Captain's quarrel—"

"Ay! but our Captain allows us all the booty—"

"Except—"

"The woman! That of course, comrade, since 'tis for love of her, you know, Lopez."

Lopez laughed gruffly.

"I suppose that, for the time being, he rates her higher than Murillo's money-bags. Well, comrade, every man to his taste, say I."

During this colloquy the ears of our friend, Putnam Pomfret, quickened by the proximity of danger so long, had lost very little of its purport; and when the voice of Pedro became silent, the North American had already comprehended the extent of the whole nefarious scheme—which was to give Murillo's wealth to plunderers and his daughter to a brigand.

"Thunder!" was his muttered ejaculation. "There's goin' to be the old Satan to pay, and *no* mistake. Somebody ought to rise the neighbors and jest spile this 'ere speculation, and, if luck ain't agin me, that somebody 'll be Put Pomfret."

Thus communing with himself, the Yankee, crouched upon all fours, began to draw himself toward the edge of the wood, endeavouring to reach a shallow portion of the stream, below the bridge, which, lying under the full glare of the moonlight, was not to be thought of as a means of continuing his progress. Could he succeed in fording the water-course, Pomfret doubted not that he should soon reach some habitation or village, where he might find shelter and disclose the villainy meditated against "Mr. Murillo."

But Putnam Pomfret was in the neighbourhood of ears as sharp as his own; and scarcely had he crawled a dozen yards ere the voice of Lopez called out:

"Pedro! what's that?"

"Somebody in yon copse, comrade," was the reply! whereat Pomfret, springing to his feet, dashed precipitately toward the river's margin.

"'Tis the spy! Send a bullet after him! Fire, Pedro, fire!"

And the two robbers, raising their carabines, discharged them simultaneously at the flying figure. But the report of the guns was answered immediately by a low laugh from the fugitive, who appeared in full view, skirting the river's border.

"After him ! Pursue ! He will escape and give the alarm!"

"That's true, Lopez ; but he runs like a deer, comrade."

"Dern yer picters !" exclaimed the North American, describing, as he glanced back, the figures of his enemies in close pursuit ; and, dodging into the bushes, he ran at full speed along the river-bank.

Meantime the brigands were greeted by the crackling of underwood and occasional glimpses of the fugitive, who kept on with unabated swiftness till he reached an open portion of the forest ; when, taking to the water, he speedily found himself on the opposite shore. Pursuing the winding water-course, Pomfret soon reached a second clearing in the woods, whereon the moonbeams fell broadly, silvering every object. Here, doffing his high-crowned hat, he deposited it upon the river-bank, and then, turning abruptly, noiselessly retraced his steps.

Hardly had he repassed to the spot where he had forded the stream, before the pursuers appeared descending to it. Pomfret, hidden by the woody shadows, watched their movements, noticing when they paused and listened for his retreating footsteps, and aware that they were scrutinizing his tracks in the sand. Presently they plunged into the water, crossed the ford, and emerged so near the place of Pomfret's concealment that he could almost touch them with his hand. But they kept on, without suspecting his promixity, and soon discovered his hat where he had deposited it, whereupon they set up a shout.

"Ha ! ha !" laughed Putnam Pomfret ; "I cal'late two greasers ain't a match for one Green Mountain boy, no how you can fix it."

CHAPTER V.

HOW A YANKEE WAS OUTWITTED.

THE moon was riding the skies in unclouded splendor. Wood, valley, mountain and stream were brilliant with her soft light. The house of Murillo the Rich, bathed in floods of radiance, was the center-piece of this picture of beauty.

This house, or rather cluster of houses—for Murillo's *hacienda* was a small village in itself, accommodating a domestic army of bipeds and quadrupeds—consisted of an extensive range of wooden out-buildings, flanking the main edifice, which was of rough stone and *adobé* brick. A wall of solid masonry separated one side of the out-houses from the high road, while, on the other side, were a deep wood and a shelf of rugged rocks, forming the lowest ridge of that mountain range which hemmed in the entire valley. On the opposite side lay a second tract of woodland, stretching to the river; and thus the dwelling of Murillo was almost surrounded by forests, rendering it no difficult matter for numbers to approach the premises without discovery, so long as they avoided the highway or remained under the shadows of the trees or rocks.

Though the moonlight fell full upon the farm-buildings, it, failed to penetrate the thick woods encompassing them. Consequently the brigands who, under the eye of their Captain, Marani, were now lying concealed about the place, felt as secure from scrutiny as if in their mountain stronghold. A dozen or more crouched between the highway wall and the out-houses; and these, armed with pistols, knives and carabines, awaited only their leader's signal to commence their attack upon the mansion.

Marani himself, with Matteo, his lieutenant, remained at the outskirts of the wood, watching a light which still gleamed from a window. The solitary taper, as Marani knew, was in the chamber of Inez Murillo, and he waited impatiently for the moment its extinguishment should announce that the maiden had sought her pillow; when he might ascend the balcony and be secure of his own portion of the prey ere the farmer's dependents could be aroused to defend their master.

"Are all here?" asked the robber chief of his subaltern.

"Lopez and Pedro are absent, Captain."

"They will arrive soon, without doubt. Meantime, lie close and await the signal."

Matteo crouched among his comrades, near the wall, while Marani resumed his watch of the casement.

"Now, by St. Geronimo?" he muttered, "this daughter of Murillo will soon learn with whom she has been coquetting

so daintily. Seek thy pillow, fair Inez, for the last time. When thou leavest it, 'twill be for the mountain throne of Marani."

The chief, smiling grimly, turned at this moment, in his walk, and found himself in abrupt collision with a figure which had emerged suddenly from the woodland shadows. In the same instant a shrill voice accosted him with, "Hullo, stranger! what in time are ye 'bout?" To which Marani answered by clutching the intruder's throat, and, placing a poniard at it, cried:

"Silence! or you die on the spot?"

"Thunder! what do you mean? Are you another hurdy-gurdy chap? Jes' let go o' my neckercher, *ef* you please."

"Señor! your business? Speak quickly!" cried Marani, tightening his clutch at the Yankee's throat.

"Jerusalem! don't choke a feller! I cal'late you don't treat peaceable travelers in that fashion, do you?"

Saying this, with a quick motion of his muscular arms, Pomfret released himself from Marani's hold, and at the same time seized the brigand's right wrist with a grip like a vice.

"Dern your picter! Be you a turnpike-keeper on the high road?"

"I am the master of this place, and you can not pass?" returned Marani, cocking a pistol with his left hand, but not daring to fire, lest a premature alarm might jeopardize his plans against Murillo's house.

"And who might this place belong to?" demanded Pomfret, keeping the brigand's wrist still secure.

"To Murillo el Rico."

"Be you Murillo—yourself?"

"That is my name. Speak! Have you business with me? I am apprehensive of an attack on my house, and hence must be cautious.

The robber's words and manner were so natural that Pomfret was thrown off his guard. He lowered his head and said:

"Well, let's go to your house, and I'll tell you somethin' about *that*."

"Proceed, Señor. What have you to say? I listen."

"Well, don't get wrathful, hoss-fly! I jes' want to let you

now that a brigand chap named Cap'n Marani is goin' to set re to your house this very night, and—"

"Well, *amigo*, where learned you this?"

"Heerd a couple o' skunks tellin' on't up the creek yonder. Jeckon I showed 'em some tall walkin'—"

"*Muchos gracias*," said Marani. "Now, have the goodness o release my wrist, and walk to the house with me. You hall be rewarded well, Señor."

"Oh! as for that—" responded Pomfret, completely deceived, and unclasping his hold of the brigand's wrist—"as for pay, stranger, I didn't cal'late—"

But a low whistle from Marani cut short the Yankee's protestation; and the next moment he felt himself grasped by the pretended Murillo. He started, but the robber's hand was again at his throat.

"Comrades," whispered Marani to his men, "this scoundrel would have betrayed our design to Murillo. What shall be the fate of the spy?"

"Death!" cried Matteo, cocking his gun.

"Jerusalem!" muttered Pomfret.

"Do nothing here to alarm the house. Bear him away."

"To the cave, noble Captain? It is far."

"No. Let him say his prayers, and then finish him."

"Jerusalem!" again cried Pomfret.

But the next instant the unfortunate Yankee was bound and gagged, stripped of his valise, and hurried from the farmhouse. Marani resumed his walk beside the wall, watching the light that still beamed from the window of the Señorita Inez.

The whole business of seizing, gagging and binding was transacted so expeditiously, that our hero had been dragged a quarter of a mile before he could regain the full possession of his scattered faculties. The two stalwart brigands had each a firm clutch of his collar, while his mouth was closed with the buckle of a heavy sword-belt, and his arms fastened behind him by a stout leather thong. At the same time, a couple of pistol-muzzles stared him threateningly in the face.

Putnam Pomfret twitched once or twice, as the grasp of the robbers tightened round his neck, but a pretty smart blow from one of the pistol-barrels satisfied him of the folly of such

a movement. He glanced nervously at the sullen features of his guards, but saw no traces of compassion.

"This comes o' goin' a fishin' in a furrin kedntry," inwardly lamented Pomfret. "Gosh! ef I ever git out o' this scrape, dern me ef I don't make tracks for Noo England, short order."

But, from the present aspect of affairs, there seemed little probability that our Yankee would ever get out of his "scrape." A brace of ferocious outlaws were hurrying him along at the quickest step possible, up a rocky path into the heart of the mountain, with the avowed purpose under orders of their chief, to cut his throat, or shoot him through the head, in as summary and noiseless a manner as could be effected. It was a situation to make an ordinary person highly nervous.

Suddenly, our hero received notice, by a violent jerk of his neck, to turn aside from the rocky path; and a moment after he was hurried or dragged across a gully, and through a cluster of tangled bushes, into the dense wood. Putnam Pomfret bethought him seriously that he should never see Weathersfield again, and a cold shudder ran through his loose limbs. Desperate, however, as was the case, he resolved not to perish without a struggle, though the idea of escape, bound and gagged as he was, appeared utterly unreasonable. Nevertheless, he knew very well that resistance could not render his position worse, while, if fortune favored him, there was a chance of bettering it.

Acting on this reflection, the North American remained quiet, while the brigands drew him forward through the bushes, until they had reached a portion of the wood so dense that scarcely a single ray of moonlight penetrated its obscurity. Here stooping suddenly between the two guards, he dashed himself against the burly Matteo, and overturned him in an instant. Then, fettered and muzzled as he was, Pomfret darted back through the thicket in the direction of the road which they had left.

"*Diablo!*" growled the fallen robber, in a terrible voice, as, recovering himself, he grasped a sapling.

"*Carrajo!* he will escape!" cried the other brigand.

"No chance for him," said Matteo. "We will have him ere he reaches the road."

And, with fierce curses, the ruffians pursued the fugitive.

Putnam had gained but a few rods, but this, to a man running for his life, was some advantage. With his hands straining behind his back, in the effort to break their fastenings, while his face grew black with the painful exertion of breathing half-choked as he was by the bandage over his mouth, the Yankee stumbled on, through the thick growth of brambles and bushes, tearing his flesh and bruising his limbs at every step. Behind him pressed the brigands, nearing him every instant.

At last, the poor fugitive gained a glimpse of the full moon, shining upon the road and gully which he had before crossed.

"Better be shot in tryin' to git away from the sarpints," said Pomfret. And, with a vigorous effort, he plunged over the gully. But, alas! it was only to fall prostrate upon the edge of the narrow path.

The violence of his fall snapped the leather thong which confined our hero's arms, though it well-nigh dislocated his shoulder-blade, and, as it was, mangled his wrist and hand most cruelly. But, feeling his limbs free, he was up again in a moment.

His head, however, was giddy with the concussion, and when he gained his feet it was to stagger feebly on, his eyes blinded, and a stream of blood gushing from his nostrils. Yet he still mustered strength to tear the belt-buckle from his mouth, and shift the bandage below his chin, all the time pressing on with all the speed he could command.

Matteo and his companion had reached the gully just as the Yankee rose, and soon they were within half a dozen rods of his back. Neither dared to discharge his carabine, lest its report should alarm the not distant farm residents before their Captain's signal of attack. But poor Pomfret was already faltering in his pace, and in a few more seconds he heard the curses of Matteo close behind him. With a last effort, he wheeled about, and raising his right foot, planted a well-directed kick against the stomach of his pursuer. Matteo reeled backward, but at the same moment the Yankee himself fell, like one dead, in the middle of the road.

Our adventurer's hour now seemed indeed to have arrived. The hindmost brigand leaped past his comrade, and planted

his knee upon the prostrate man, while Matteo, bent almost double by the kick he had received, staggered forward, and raised his knife to plunge it into our hero's heart.

"No, comrade," said the other, pushing back the arm of the furious Matteo. "Not yet. Remember our Captain's orders. Let the poor devil say his prayers."

"Curse him! he shall die at once!" cried Matteo.

"No! he's a brave fellow. His soul must be saved! Here, Señor, kiss the cross!" said the bandit, raising the Yankee's head, and placing a cross-hilted dagger to his lips. "Say your prayers quickly, before you die."

Pomfret strove to raise himself, his eyes glancing from one to another of the frowning faces of his captors. The brigand, shifting his knee from the breast of his prisoner, allowed him to obtain a kneeling position, while the revengeful Matteo stood scowling by, ready to sheathe his knife in the bosom of his doomed enemy, as soon as his brief prayer should be ended. At this moment, two men sprung precipitately from the wood into the road.

Matteo and his comrade leveled their carabines, but lowered the muzzles immediately, on recognizing the new-comers. Pomfret also recollected the faces of the brace who now advanced. They were the brigands from whom he had escaped—Lopez and Pedro.

These two, drawing near, exchanged salutations with their comrades; and Pedro, the mock musician, yelled with delight as he beheld the Yankee's situation.

"Aha! the spy! Hang him. Tomaso—hang him up, at once!" he cried, slapping his arm, and making frightful faces at Pomfret.

"Well thought of, had we a rope."

"That have I, comrade," said Pedro, producing from beneath his jacket a long cord, or lasso, such as the brigands sometimes had occasion to use in their marauding excursions.

"*Diablo!* but I must be executioner," growled Matteo, with a savage laugh.

"Up with him, then, at once," said Pedro.

"Let him say his prayers," interposed Tomaso.

"*Caramba!* he has had time enough," answered Matteo.

"We must obey our Captain's orders," said Tomaso, who

was a strict disciplinarian, and acted as a sort of orderly sergeant to the robber band.

"Quick, Señor! pray, and be hanged!"

Pomfret had given up all hopes of escape at the instant he recognized the features of Pedro. So now, closing his eyes, he murmured a short prayer, while the robber Tomaso adjusted the noose around his neck, and threw the other end of the lasso across an overhanging bough.

Matteo and Pedro looked on in greedy anticipation of revenge.

CHAPTER VI.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

"'Tis a bright night for a ride!" quoth Don Ferrardo Nunez, as he mounted his horse at the barrack-gate, in order to attend his friend La Vega on their romantic expedition to the house of Murillo. "But perhaps it might be as well for the success of our adventure if the moon would obligingly shroud herself in a rebozo of clouds, *amigo*."

"Bright or dark, I care not, so I succeed in my object," answered Antonio La Vega, reining his splendid steed, which clamped the bit, and pranced about, as if impatient to bear his master at full speed to his object. "To-night Inez must be mine."

"Success to love and bravery!" cried Nunez. "Are all our men prepared to march?"

"Not only prepared, Ferrardo, but actually on the way. I was too impatient for the business to delay a moment, I assure you. They rendezvous at the cross-road leading to the 'Outlaw's Mount,' where we can instruct them as to our work."

"Good, Antonio! love is the parent of promptitude."

"Say, rather, *revenge*, Ferrardo. I shall also have my revenge upon the proud girl."

"You are a strange fellow, Antonio, to talk of revenge and love in the same breath. Well, well! Your revenge will

probably end in loving the maiden to death. But let us away, *amigo*—the evening wears.”

“You say well, Ferrardo. Let us go.”

The two cavaliers spurred their horses, and galloped along the road for the distance of a quarter of a mile, when they reached another path, branching rather precipitously up toward the mountain passes. Both riders were well armed, and clad in dark undress uniforms, which set off their compact and graceful figures to the best advantage. The moonlight, at this hour, was indeed most brilliant, and the excitement of adventure gave their nocturnal ride a goodly share of romance to lengthen its attractions. On they went, up the rocky pathway, now reining in their horses to pass leisurely along the edge of a frowning precipice, and now using spur and whip to leap a chasm or broad gully.

They arrived at length at a small patch of woodland, inclosing an area of open ground, on which they found the thirty picked men whom La Vega had dispatched thither, drawn up in order, awaiting their arrival. A few words from the young commanders explained to the soldiers, much to their gratification, that their destination, instead of being the hospitable “Outlaw’s Mount,” where the best fare they could expect would be the bullets of brigands, was nothing but the house of a rich farmer, where neither hardship nor danger were to be found. The authority of their officers, with a promise of extra dollars and rations, satisfied whatever scruples they might entertain as to the legality of attacking a peaceable and wealthy citizen, as well as insured their profound secrecy in regard to the leadership of the affair. And, to tell the truth, it is very easy to satisfy a Mexican soldier of any thing you desire, provided your arguments be backed with silver and wine.

The signal was given to march, and the troop, leaving the wood, moved slowly and silently down the narrow pathway toward the valley, about the middle of which, as we have seen, was situated Murillo’s house. Had they suspected, however, that Marani, with his terrible band, was already there before them, perhaps these soldiers would not have been so ready to obey their leaders in the matter of attacking a farmer’s dwelling.

Don Ferrardo and La Vega, on horseback, brought up the rear of their troop, and arranged the plan of attack in such a way that both felt sure of its success. La Vega himself had resolved to scale the balcony beneath the Señorita's window, and thus obtain an entrance to her chamber. Then, by fair means, if possible, he was to induce the maiden to trust herself to his protection ; and if she should be so uncourteous as to refuse, he was to wrap her up in his military cloak, which now hung at his saddle-bow, and, bearing her out to the balcony, drop her very gently into the arms of Don Ferrardo Nunez, who, in the mean while, was to keep good watch for his friend without. The soldiers were to be concealed in the wood, and only summoned in case that old Murillo and his servants should become aroused, and endeavor to rescue the Señorita.

Now this scheme, as the reader will at once perceive, was a very shrewd one, and, doubtless, our cavaliers had good reasons for anticipating complete success.

They kept on in fine order, though silently, till they had descended nearly to the lowest range of elevated land above the valley, and were in fact within a mile of the farmer's dwelling. Here they halted to arrange their further proceedings in a council of war, which, owing to there being no difference of opinion, was very brief. The result was that our two officers dismounted from their horses, which they gave in charge to a couple of soldiers, and placing themselves at the head of the troop, led the way through the woodland toward a point where they intended to cross, and gain the rear of Murillo's. Slowly and with caution they pursued their way, lest any straggler from the farm-buildings should discover their approach. Thus, at every step, they neared both the object which they sought, the fair Inez Murillo, and the object which they did *not* seek, Marani's band.

Suddenly, in approaching the point at which they proposed to strike off toward the rear of the farm-house, La Vega's quick ear caught the sound of suppressed human voices ; the word was passed for an immediate halt.

It was at this moment that our unfortunate friend, Pomfret, repeated to himself what he anticipated were to be his last prayers on earth ; Tomaso was tying a hangman's knot under

his ear, and the others stood on either side, anxious to hoist the poor Yankee to the bough above them.

And at this moment, as fortune would have it, the two Mexican officers had halted their troop within a dozen rods of the spot, and were themselves engaged, being concealed just within the wood, in overlooking the proceedings of the brigands, with a quiet determination to arrest the work as speedily as possible.

Accordingly, without the sound of a footfall, a dozen of the trained soldiers were brought in line with the road, and placed ready, with their long daggers drawn, to advance upon the four executioners, as quickly as the word should be given; for, like the robbers themselves, the military did not venture to use their firearms, from apprehension of alarming the inmates of the farm-buildings. Little did revengeful Matteo and grinning Pedro imagine, as they hurried Tomaso in his hangman's task, that such neighbors were so near, to spoil their pleasant interlude.

"Up with the cursed spy!" muttered Pedro.

"Ay, give me the rope! He shall swing in a trice," growled Matteo.

Meantime, Pomfret had not uttered a prayer for mercy, or striven to change the purpose of his fierce captors. Whatever might be his reflections, he had remained silent, and now stood with the cord tight about his neck, and his enemies ready to draw him in a moment up into the tree branches. He felt the rope tighten and choke, and was conscious that another pull would lift his feet from mother earth.

But that pull did not follow; for at this juncture, Matteo, Pedro, Lopez, and Tomaso were seized by a dozen powerful soldiers, and, almost before they could utter a curse, were thrown upon the ground, pinioned, and held in complete subjection by the overpowering spectacle of a score of men surrounding them, all armed with carabines, pistols and knives, and apparently quite ready to use these dangerous implements.

Pomfret, till now more dead than alive, suddenly discovered the turn affairs had taken. He saw his captors stretched powerless upon the ground, and felt himself almost miraculously saved from certain death. The rope noose was still tight about his neck, the other extremity dangling across

the tree bough. Put looked bewildered, a moment, at soldiers and brigands; and then, without saying either "thanks" or "by your leave," he gathered the slack of the lasso in his hand, and springing from the road, dashed at the top of his speed through the forest.

What impelled this flight, Put himself could never afterward explain. Whether his late proximity to death made him anxious to leave the scene of peril as soon as possible, or whether he dreaded to find new enemies in the conquerors of his old ones, is equally inscrutable; but this much is positive—that our Yankee never paused in his flight till he had left the road, gully and thicket far behind him, and was scrambling, faint and weary, up a rocky pass, nearly a league from Murillo's house.

The first impulse of Ferrardo was to order pursuit of the fugitive; but a second's reflection prevented him, as a single shout of the flying man, should he be followed, might alarm the whole household of the farmer, and defeat their plans. Consequently, he was allowed full scope of retreat, and the officers turned their attention to the four captured men.

From the arms and accouterments of these, they were recognized at once as brigands; but to all the questions put to them they deigned not the slightest attention, maintaining a sullen silence, the result of Marani's severe discipline, which in fact had contributed not a little to the security of the band; inasmuch as no torture nor punishment had ever forced a confession or one word from a captured robber, which might betray the interests of the band. This fact was well known to La Vega; so, after a few useless queries, the silent brigands were disarmed, and placed under guard within the wood, while the two officers with a score of men, advanced toward the rear of Murillo's house, to carry out the contemplated abduction of Inez.

All this time, about a quarter of a mile nearer the farm buildings, Marani, the brigand, was pacing up and down the shadow of the wood, waiting for the Señorita's light to be extinguished, in order that he might give the signal of attack, and, while his band surrounded the building, penetrate, himself, to the maiden's couch, and bear her away to his mountain retreat.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ABDUCTION.

THE night was wearing, but its beauty was sublime in that quiet valley. So thought a youth who, late as was the hour, now sauntered slowly across the open fields stretching to the rocks near Murillo's house. This youth was a lithe and graceful figure; his limbs slight, but a buoyancy in his movements that betokened a light heart; and as the moon's rays illumed his upturned face, they revealed a clear brow, with red lips and rounded chin, and eyes of sweet expression. Evidently a more than common spirit was enshrined in those fair proportions. Lorenzo, the young artist, was a genius, and an enthusiast in all lovely things.

The youth advanced lightly through the meadow, holding his guitar in one hand, and striking at intervals a string, as though uncertain thoughts of melody were thrilling his nerves. Indeed, with the rare loveliness of that night, the thought of Inez Murillo harmonized so fitly, that it was no wonder our artist was now composing an extempore song, in which he compared the beauty of his love to the smile of stars, and the breath of flowers, exactly as all lovers have done from time immemorial. For—let poets and romancers say what they please—when one really loves, he can not help being commonplace, since every lover knows that his mistress is incomparable, and that all similes for *her* beauty must of necessity be flat and meager.

Nevertheless, Lorenzo continued to hum and thrum, as he drew nearer to Murillo's house. A patch of wood was between himself and the building; consequently he could not see the light glimmering from the casement of Inez, though he would have wagered his guitar that the light was *there*—because he knew very well it was always shining when he was expected. In truth, Inez Murillo was waiting, and listening anxiously, too, for the first notes of Lorenzo's guitar, which, on moonlight nights like this, was always sure to be heard tinkling in a serenade.

It is a remarkable fact that all young ladies love serenades, and will get up out of their warm beds, and shiver for an hour at an open window, rather than lose one note of a song which they fancy intended for their own special ear. Ah! what multitudes of coughs, stiff necks and neuralgic affections proceed from this affection for serenades!

Yet Inez would never have owned that she cared a straw for Lorenzo's guitar, or Lorenzo's voice, or, for that matter, Lorenzo's self. Nevertheless, she always left her taper burning till the tinkling began; and then, stealing near to the closed lattice, she would peep cautiously out, to see the young artist standing so patiently in the moonlight, his face turned upward, and his lips breathing forth the most musical language imaginable. Then Inez would hold her breath, listening until the last strain was over; and then she watched Lorenzo walking away, till his form was hidden by the trees. And when all this was over, she would lie down on her soft, white bed, and, kissing the little silver cross which had been the gift of her dying mother, the maiden would murmur:

"Poor Lorenzo! he is a good soul!"

But, in spite of all this, Inez might have laughed, had anybody told her that she *loved* Lorenzo. And as for Lorenzo himself, he never dared to dream of such a thing. Nevertheless, our artist hummed and thrummed on moonlight nights, and the maiden waited and listened.

But little did the youth think, as he leisurely approached Murillo's house, on this particular night, that so many fierce neighbors were awake and watching around it. Occupied with the tuneful fancies which were shaping themselves into song in his brain, the youth entered the little patch of wood that hid the maiden's window, and, crossing quickly through its shadows, took his station, as usual, beneath the balcony, and commenced a preparatory thrumming of his guitar—a sort of extempore prelude to the impromptu song.

It was just at this moment, that La Vega and Nunez, advancing toward the farm-house, had discovered, and were about to frustrate, the hanging intentions of the four braves, which threatened so seriously the unfortunate Putnam Pomfret.

And it was precisely at this moment, likewise, that Maruni, cogitating, as he watched the light in the Señorita's chamber,

whether it were best to delay any longer his attack, had almost determined on giving the appointed signal to his band, when—*tum, tum, tum*, sounded Lorenzo's guitar.

"In the fiend's name, what is that?" muttered the brigand chief, starting at such unexpected music. "Whom have we here, now?"

As he spoke, Marani glided stealthily to a position whence he could observe the person of the unconscious serenader.

A single glance sufficed to discover to the brigand that the new-comer was the young artist whose dextrous intervention had probably saved his life in his sudden quarrel with his rival, La Vega. This unlooked-for appearance took the robber aback, threatening as it did to derange his well-concerted plans. But Marani was a man of quick wit, and he saw in a moment how the presence of Lorenzo might be turned to his own account. He now divined the reason why the light had remained so long unextinguished in the maiden's chamber; and so, forming his resolution instanter, he summoned two of his band.

"Jacopo," whispered he to a supple, Indian-featured man who appeared first, "see you yonder popinjay, with his lute?"

"I do, Captain."

"Well, Jacopo, if we stop not his music, ye may lose your booty to-night. See, now, comrades, if ye can not capture the trim youth without blow or murmur. Creep cautiously along beneath the balcony, and muffle the young gallant ere he can cry '*quien es!*' What say you, Jacopo?"

"It shall be done, Captain."

"Go, then; and look that ye be well covered by the balcony. I warrant *she* is watching him," muttered the brigand chief, as his ready subordinates crept toward Lorenzo. "Ay, doubtless, yonder smooth-cheek is pleasing in her eyes—but she shall be Marani's bride, for all that!"

Saying this, Marani folded his arms, and gazed at the artist, while Jacopo and his comrade proceeded stealthily toward the balcony, and, concealed by the thick growth of stunted trees that grew along the path, managed very soon to obtain a position whence they could easily spring upon and secure the young minstrel before he could give the alarm or make resistance.

Lorenzo, meanwhile, wholly intent upon his song and his mistress, never dreamed of such things as ropes, matchlocks, and the like, but continued to thrum his guitar in the most approved manner. The Señorita, too, hidden by the blinds of her casement, was listening to catch every note.

Tum, tum, tum, sounded the prelude.

But, hardly had the first full note of the song from guitar and voice broken the quiet night air, when both were instantaneously hushed. Lorenzo's mouth open to its utmost extent in the enunciation of his first sweet syllable, was suddenly closed by the rude hand of Jacopo, and with the quickness of thought our minstrel's arms were secured behind him, and a thick mantle wound round his head.

This unceremonious proceeding took poor Lorenzo so completely by surprise that he had scarcely time to recover his senses before he felt himself lifted bodily from the ground, and borne from beneath the balcony at a pace that showed his captors to be both strong and active in the business of kidnapping.

Marani, from his position, could see very plainly the whole operation, which took place immediately under the balcony, and, of course, was hidden from the timid gaze of the maiden who watched above. The brigand smiled triumphantly as he beheld the artist hurried silently around the corner of the house; and, shifting his short cloak to one shoulder—

"Now," said he, "I will try *my* skill at a serenade. Methinks I can thrum the guitar as well as the boy himself."

Saying this, and directing another brace of his band to follow quietly, Marani crept along the hedge in a manner by which Jacopo and his comrade had gained their concealment. Arrived at the balcony, he took the artist's lute from the ground where the robbers had left it, and ran his fingers at once and boldly over the strings.

Inez, who had been somewhat surprised at the sudden cessation of Lorenzo's song, now bent her pretty head again to listen. But it was not, indeed, Marani's intention to waste his time in a love-song; for he had scarcely sounded a bar, when he threw the instrument upon the sward, and with a slight movement clambered up the corner of the farm house, and swung himself softly on to the balcony. Inez, instead of

hearing a repetition of the music, was startled the next instant by a low tap at her casement.

Now, such a thing as this was the last in the world that the Señorita imagined the young Lorenzo would do. To clamber up to a lady's balcony, and knock at her casement at midnight, was, to be sure, carrying a serenade a trifle too far. But, then, for the modest, timid, gentle Lorenzo to attempt such a daring feat, was almost too incredible for belief. She must be mistaken, surely! It must have been the wind!

But, no! There it sounds again—tap, tap, tap!

"Surely, Lorenzo must be crazy," thought the trembling Señorita. "He can not think I would open the lattice. *Santa Maria!* I know not what to do. I tremble all over. What if my father should discover him? We should all be ruined!"

Tap, tap! Once more the knocking at the casement.

"What shall I do? Mercy! if he be ill! Ah! but then he could not climb up the balcony. No! he is not ill, surely. Ah, perhaps he has a present for me—a bunch of flowers, perhaps—that is all! Poor Lorenzo! still, I dare not open the lattice."

Thus the maiden murmured, while her little heart beat violently, as if—which was indeed the case—it was half-frightened to death. But, some way or other, when a young maiden hesitates and deliberates between love and duty, she generously ends the conflict by doing what is very imprudent; so Inez, after debating a minute longer, concluded that she would just open the lattice a little, a very little way, and tell Lorenzo he was very wicked, and must go away; that she was shocked at his conduct, and—a great many other things she thought of telling him, which, if she should do, would take at least half an hour to get through with.

"And then," thought the poor girl, "if he has brought me a bouquet, I'll not take it just to punish him for his impudence."

Saying this, Inez gently unfastened the lattice, and opening it but a hair's breadth, said, in a tone which she fancied very severe:

"What do you want, Lorenzo? Go away!"

All this time Marani was waiting on the balcony, in the

shadow of the wall. When he saw the lattice unfastened, and heard the maiden's low voice, he pressed hard against the blind, and with one effort forced it open.

Inez, who had expected to hear Lorenzo's voice asking her to forgive him, and begging her to accept his flowers, almost swooned away, as she felt herself forced back, and saw the tall, dark form which stood in the balcony. But, before she could scream, Marani had flung himself into her apartment, and thrown his mantle around her head, smothering her breath in the way the brigands had silenced Lorenzo. Then the Señorita felt herself lifted in the robber's hands, and pressed closely to his breast. Consciousness forsook her, and she knew not when Marani lifted her through the casement and placed her insensible form in the arms of one of the brigands who waited beneath.

"She has fainted!" said the chief, hurriedly, as he lowered her. "Bear her gently to the road at once. I will descend in an instant."

The robbers received the muffled girl, and departed, Marani swung himself from the balcony, and was about to follow his men, when two figures emerged suddenly from behind the corner of the building.

"Look, Ferrardo! By heaven! it is Inez—they are dragging her away!" cried the voice of La Vega—for it was he—as the two new-comers caught a glimpse of the maiden's white robe, as she was borne away by the brigands.

"Let us follow, Antonio," answered Nunez, drawing his sword, and dashing after the robbers, who had now disappeared within the wood.

La Vega was about to do the same, but suddenly the tall form of Marani confronted him.

"Dog of a soldier!" cried the brigand chief, making a desperate lunge at the officer, whose sword met and parried his thrust with the quickness of lightning.

"Ha! do we meet?" cried La Vega, setting his teeth, and pressing on his antagonist.

Marani's reply was the instantaneous discharge of a pistol, which he drew with his left hand from his belt. La Vega, blinded by the flash, though unwounded, retreated a pace, slipping on the green turf, while the brigand Captain,

pursuing his advantage, threw himself forward upon his foe.

The next moment, a confused noise of pistol-shots and cries, mingled with a woman's shriek in the woods at some distance, startled the forest-echoes, and then Marani whistled shrilly to his band, for his eye had caught the flash of soldiers' arms in the moonlight, and he knew that his men were attacked, perhaps by a far superior force.

At the same instant, La Vega recovered his footing and prepared for the robber's assault. A din of horrid sounds now rattled around the farm-buildings; curses, shouts and musket-shots mingled furiously together, and the household of Murillo, startled from their slumbers, flocked from the doors in wild alarm. Then suddenly a column of smoke rose from the gable of the farm-house. La Vega looked up, as he made ready for Marani's attack, and beheld the chamber of Inez enveloped in flames, which cast their blazing light upon the green sward. Then the two foes again crossed swords, and renewed the combat, while the noise of battle, the shrieks of terrified women, and the shouts of soldiers and robbers, united to make the scene one of fearful interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

ZUMOSIN, THE PEON.

THE "Outlaw's Mount," with its waving trees and shifting shadows, shot up like a vast sheet from the plain; and on the summit of a peak, where overhung the feathery branches of the highest trees, arose a natural altar—a pulpit, as it seemed, from which a high priest of Nature might interpret her counsels to a kneeling world. Formed of the white rock of the mountain, there had it endured the storms of ages; and now, as the moonlight brightened its ruddy sides, the imagination of one who beheld it might well adore an awful unseen Presence, bending from its front, and voicelessly communing with millions of the disembodied spirits of a perished race.

And upon the highest ridge of this sublime mountain, stood a figure, erect and motionless. It was that of a young man, who, with arms crossed on his broad bosom, gazed down upon the moonlit landscape. Beneath him grew, or rather moldered, the moss-grown and blackened form of an ancient tree, whose branches had been shivered by the lightning many years before; and the youth, slightly resting against the riven trunk, seemed unconscious of everything save a desire to prolong the deep draught of beauty which his soul was drinking from the glorious scene beneath him.

We left our friend Putnam Pomfret, in the act of vigorously escaping, at once from his friends and enemies, with a halter about his neck, and sundry cuts and bruises upon his ill-treated person. Straight for the thickest parts of the forest our hero pursued his flight, seemingly resolved to place as great as possible distance between himself and the unlucky vicinity of Murillo's mansion. He stopped not for bush nor bramble, but, clambering over rocks, bogs, and aught else that impeded his course, soon had the satisfaction of finding himself, wearied out and gasping for breath, on a high ridge of rocks, shelving over a mountain chasm, on one side of which towered still loftier precipices, and on the other, far beneath into the valley, stretched the long tract of forest through which his upward flight had led him. Here, completely exhausted, the Yankee threw himself prostrate on the ground, immediately beneath that high rock, now occupied, as we have noticed, by a solitary admirer of nature.

To the habitual novel-reader it may seem abundantly romantic, whilst to the domestic critic it will, perhaps, appear ridiculous, that we should choose to present a solitary individual in such a lonesome and out-of-the-way place as a Mexican mountain, exposed to the night air and moonshine, with the physical certainty of contracting a cold in the joints. Indeed, were we inclined to be simply romantic, we need not have climbed this mountain cliff to obtain a position to effect our purpose. There is romance enough—terrible, sublime romance—in the everyday walks of civilized life, to cast into shade all the incidents and accessories of brigandage and adventure. More of the matter which forms the romancer's *material* is to be found within a mile circuit of our own

doors, than could be encountered in the wildest realms of a fertile imagination. But the veil which conceals our own hearts hides also those around us, and we gaze afar off for shadowy transcripts, which are, after all, but reflections of the unnoted romance at our feet.

The youth whom we have described was one of a great class of his countrymen. Within his soul dwelt the shadow of a cruel fate, which bound to the earth not only him, but millions, formed like himself in the image of their Maker. He had learned to suffer, and to hide his sufferings; and though scarcely a quarter of a century had flung its suns and storms across his path, yet there was that in the icy calm of his forehead and the compressed moving of his rigid lips, which betokened more than was revealed; and though his glossy hair was yet unsprinkled with silver, and his eyes gleamed with undimmed fire, it might still be probable that this young man had lived longer, in endurance and experience, through his few years, than many do whose existence over-spans the natural boundaries of human life.

A slave he was, though the descendant of a mighty race of kings; a slave, though his blood leaped hotly and swift along its healthy channels; a slave, though his brain glowed with an intellect that rose, starlike, over the gloom of his destiny—such was Anselmo Zumozin, or, as he called himself in his better moments, “Zumozin the Serf.”

It is not generally known that, although slavery, as it exists in the United States, was long ago abolished in Mexico, there still remains in that unhappy land a system of serfdom immeasurably more degrading than the vassalage of the middle ages, and at best on a level with the worst forms of African bondage. This is the state of Peonage, which prevails more or less throughout the whole of Mexico, and by which thousands are held in the most abject and hopeless servitude, sold and transferred with the land they cultivate or the mines they work.

Peonage, though neither hereditary nor endless in the eye of the law, is yet as complete a system of slavery as can be imagined. The process is as follows:

If a Mexican has contracted a debt, and either can not or will not pay it, his creditor brings a complaint before an *alcalde*

or local magistrate, who immediately summons the debtor. Should the statements of the parties conflict, witnesses are called, and if the debt be proved, the magistrate orders it to be paid at once. If the debtor can not do this, he is brought out and sold for the amount of his creditor's claim, to labor for his purchaser at wages' service until such time as he shall have earned a sufficient sum to purchase back his freedom.

Under this horrible system he may be doomed to perpetual servitude by the simple decision of a magistrate. The corruption of Mexican courts is so notorious that an oath is seldom administered in cases of debt, and the creditor, if he be wealthy, is almost certain of a decision in his favor, from which there is no escape on the part of the wretch who owes. An appeal would but expose a poor and friendless man to new persecution, and, in the end, to a severe fate.

When the debtor is sold, and becomes a peon, he is removed to the land or property of his new master, and if he have a family, is provided with a hut, which is but one remove from an Indian's wigwam, and with certain rations of food. To each peon is allowed two almodes or about half a bushel of corn, per week, which is all the law constrains a master to supply; and should the peon require more for himself and family, he must procure it, together with his clothing, at his own expense.

But, as no one will furnish a peon with food or clothing on credit—he being what is called in law a *ward*—he remains, of course, entirely dependent upon his master. Consequently, being compelled to procure every necessary from the latter, he increases constantly in indebtedness—every charge for food or clothing being added to the original obligation for which the wretch was sold, and, of course, swelling the debt at last to such an amount that the debtor, powerless to liquidate it, remains a bond-slave for his natural life, and moreover, is compelled to sell his children in order to gain the means of subsistence otherwise inaccessible; for the wages to which a peon is entitled amount to but the meanest jointure, often are merely nominal, while the goods which his wants necessitate him to purchase are rated enormously; so it may be easily seen that a man once reduced to a state of thralldom like this, will only year by year, sink into more hopeless servitude.

Such a slave as this was Anselmo Zumozin, save that in the history of this man was supposed to be involved more subtle machinery than in common cases of oppression. Far down, and stretching for leagues around, the youth could mark where, hidden amid the thick woods, were the huts of peons like himself, scattered over the scene of their compulsory labor, from which they could hope to escape only when death should claim their mortal frames, and their place be left vacant for a new slave.

The serf's broad breast heaved, and he dashed his hand hurriedly across his eyes, as if to shut out some fearful vision. Then, stretching aloft his arms, and lifting his brow till the moonbeams fell upon his fine features, as on the lineaments of a marble statue, he gave way to a burst of passionate feeling, couched in the beautiful idiom of the ancient Mexic tongue.

"Spirits of my fathers!" he cried aloud, as he gazed over mountain and valley and up to the bright heavens, with one sweeping glance. Then he paused. The proud gesture with which he had seemed to invoke the past to give up its glorious phantoms was succeeded by a slack depression of his arms, and the sinking of his head upon his chest.

"What have I to do with my fathers?" he murmured, in a broken voice. "What has Zumozin the Serf to do with the brave spirits who once breathed courage into their countrymen—ay, and battled with fate itself, rather than yield their necks to the foot of the Spaniard? What am I but a slave like these—like these?"

He waved his arm gloomily, as he spoke, in the direction of the peon huts, scattered beneath. Then, relapsing into silence, he resumed his fixed attitude.

The point of rock upon which the Peon stood was the highest of a chain of abrupt eminences commanding a view of much of the surrounding country, as well as of the cliffs beneath. And now, as Anselmo's abstracted gaze fell upon the mountain side, at some distance below, it was attracted by a moving object which appeared advancing swiftly from the woods below, and rapidly surmounting the stair-like precipices.

This object was no other than our friend Pomfret, who, when thus overlooked by the solitary Peon, was in the act of making the best use of his recovered liberty, increasing, as he fancied, the distance between himself and his enemies.

Zumozin watched the Yankee's progress, at a loss to conjecture what manner of person it could be who pursued a course so reckless, and up a path which, in broad daylight, was at least perilous. When, however, he suddenly lost sight of the fugitive, and waited in vain during several minutes for his reappearance, the Peon began to apprehend that the man, whoever he might be, had missed his footway, and fallen headlong into some concealed chasm. So, girding tighter the belt that confined his blanket about his waist, he grasped a short iron-tipped pole which had rested against the shattered tree, and, leaving the cliff, descended toward the spot where his glance had rested on the runner.

A few moments sufficed to enable him to reach the patch of sward, where, overpowered by the peril and fatigue of the last few hours, the Yankee had fallen upon the ground, and now lay without motion or apparent life.

"He is dead!" muttered the Peon, stooping over Pomfret's rigid form. "Dead! and there is one less of an accursed race upon the earth. But, ha!" he continued, turning the Yankee's face toward the moonlight, "this is no Spaniard, it is an Englishman! Well, let him rot! They are all alike oppressors; let them perish like dogs!"

Thus spoke the moody Zumozin, rising from the Yankee's side, and standing with folded arms, his lip curled with a bitter smile.

At this moment the report of a pistol sounded from the vale beneath, echoing among the rocky passes. It was immediately followed by a succession of quick discharges of musketry, accompanied with distant shouts and cries. And then from the woods below there shot upward a column of smoke and flame.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPECTER OF THE FLAMES.

INEZ MURILLO, completely insensible, and muffled in the brigand's cloak, was hurried by her rude captors from the vicinity of the farm-house. The two robbers had, however, scarcely reached the roadside, when the noise of firing notified

Such a slave as this was Anselmo Zumozin, save that in the history of this man was supposed to be involved more subtle machinery than in common cases of oppression. Far down, and stretching for leagues around, the youth could mark where, hidden amid the thick woods, were the huts of peons like himself, scattered over the scene of their compulsory labor, from which they could hope to escape only when death should claim their mortal frames, and their place be left vacant for a new slave.

The serf's broad breast heaved, and he dashed his hand hurriedly across his eyes, as if to shut out some fearful vision. Then, stretching aloft his arms, and lifting his brow till the moonbeams fell upon his fine features, as on the lineaments of a marble statue, he gave way to a burst of passionate feeling, couched in the beautiful idiom of the ancient Mexic tongue.

"Spirits of my fathers!" he cried aloud, as he gazed over mountain and valley and up to the bright heavens, with one sweeping glance. Then he paused. The proud gesture with which he had seemed to invoke the past to give up its glorious phantoms was succeeded by a slack depression of his arms, and the sinking of his head upon his chest.

"What have I to do with my fathers?" he murmured, in a broken voice. "What has Zumozin the Serf to do with the brave spirits who once breathed courage into their countrymen—ay, and battled with fate itself, rather than yield their necks to the foot of the Spaniard? What am I but a slave like these—like these?"

He waved his arm gloomily, as he spoke, in the direction of the peon huts, scattered beneath. Then, relapsing into silence, he resumed his fixed attitude.

The point of rock upon which the Peon stood was the highest of a chain of abrupt eminences commanding a view of much of the surrounding country, as well as of the cliffs beneath. And now, as Anselmo's abstracted gaze fell upon the mountain side, at some distance below, it was attracted by a moving object which appeared advancing swiftly from the woods below, and rapidly surmounting the stair-like precipices.

This object was no other than our friend Pomfret, who, when thus overlooked by the solitary Peon, was in the act of making the best use of his recovered liberty, increasing, as he fancied, the distance between himself and his enemies.

Zumozin watched the Yankee's progress, at a loss to conjecture what manner of person it could be who pursued a course so reckless, and up a path which, in broad daylight, was at least perilous. When, however, he suddenly lost sight of the fugitive, and waited in vain during several minutes for his reappearance, the Peon began to apprehend that the man, whoever he might be, had missed his footway, and fallen headlong into some concealed chasm. So, girding tighter the belt that confined his blanket about his waist, he grasped a short iron-tipped pole which had rested against the shattered tree, and, leaving the cliff, descended toward the spot where his glance had rested on the runner.

A few moments sufficed to enable him to reach the patch of sward, where, overpowered by the peril and fatigue of the last few hours, the Yankee had fallen upon the ground, and now lay without motion or apparent life.

"He is dead!" muttered the Peon, stooping over Pomfret's rigid form. "Dead! and there is one less of an accursed race upon the earth. But, ha!" he continued, turning the Yankee's face toward the moonlight, "this is no Spaniard, it is an Englishman! Well, let him rot! They are all alike oppressors; let them perish like dogs!"

Thus spoke the moody Zumozin, rising from the Yankee's side, and standing with folded arms, his lip curled with a bitter smile.

At this moment the report of a pistol sounded from the vale beneath, echoing among the rocky passes. It was immediately followed by a succession of quick discharges of musketry, accompanied with distant shouts and cries. And then from the woods below there shot upward a column of smoke and flame.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPECTER OF THE FLAMES.

INEZ MURILLO, completely insensible, and muffled in the brigand's cloak, was hurried by her rude captors from the vicinity of the farm-house. The two robbers had, however, scarcely reached the roadside, when the noise of firing notified

them that the attack had commenced. They discovered, likewise, that Marani was not following them.

"The work is begun!" cried the brigand who supported the fainting girl.

It had indeed begun. The soldiers saw, at a glance, the true condition of affairs, and immediately flew, with a will, into the conflict. Marani found his match in Vega, but, scorning to fly, was soon seized and bound, together with four officers who flew to his aid. Deprived of their leader, and inferior in numbers to the soldiery, the brigands were cut down mercilessly. Those who escaped unhurt made at once for the mountain passes, so that very soon none remained of the band save the dead upon the ground, and the prisoners, Marani the chief and his four subordinates.

But, although the object of this marauding expedition on the part of both soldiers and brigands had been thus far frustrated, the scene around Murillo's mansion was a sad one. The burning buildings were crackling and flashing beneath the quiet sky, surrounded at a short distance by groups of soldiers, terrified farm-servants, and the figures of wounded and dying men, struck down in the brief but desperate struggle. The soldiers made no attempt to arrest the progress of the flames, which indeed were now beyond all human control, and the other spectators were occupied in hurried prayers and supplications as they knelt, terror-stricken, upon the sward.

Murillo the Rich, attended by a few members of his household, lay upon a bank at the edge of the wood. The old man had been suddenly awakened from his peaceful slumbers by the noise of the attack, and had escaped from his house only to behold it devoured by the angry flames, and to fall, almost bereft of life, into the arms of a faithful servitor. He was now slowly recovering from his swoon, and his first words were :

"My daughter—where is Inez !"

The terrified servants could only answer him by their averted eyes.

"Alas ! Santa Madonna ! we have not seen the Señorita !"

Murillo sprung to his feet, forgetful of all weakness, and with gaze fixed upon the burning walls of his house as if it might penetrate the red curtain of fire. Then, rushing wildly

from the servants, the old man reached the gable of the building where were situated the balcony and casement of his daughter's chamber. As he fled, his white hair streamed disorderly over his half-clad shoulders.

"My child! Inez! my daughter!" he screamed; but no accents replied from beyond the rampart of flame.

"Tell me, oh! if ye be human beings, where is my child?" implored the poor old man, as he turned his agonized eyes upon the circle of faces around him. "Have none of you beheld my Inez?" he repeated, in wilder tones.

But none could reply. The crimson tongues of flame which now lapped every casement, appeared to mock at human impotence. Gusts of fiery heat flew downward, and volumes of cinders ascended over the woodland. The balcony of the Señorita's chamber had fallen, and from the window nothing issued but stifling smoke, the light woodwork having been quite consumed.

But did the ears of those who listened mock them? Or was it a mortal voice which appeared to sound from the interior of that chamber.

"Listen!" he cried to another, in whispered accents.

It was indeed a human voice, choked and broken, as if the one who cried out were fighting with death. And presently, protruding from the blackened rafters of the gable, a human head appalled the spectators beneath. The fitful gleam from other parts of the building revealed a strange figure emerging through fragments of the dismantled roof; and the next moment it plunged from the height into the midst of the servants, who, stricken with superstitious terror, shrunk cowering behind Murillo. But the white-haired father rushed forward, murmuring:

"My daughter! my Inez! where is she?"

Then the staggering figure became rigid, its arms were uplifted, and a hollow groan, breaking from its lips, shaped a single word.

"Dead!"

Murillo sunk heavily to the ground; while the weird-like blackened being, tossing its arms, uttered a shrill yell, and fled across the green-sward. The soldiers crossed themselves, muttering *Paters* and *Aves*, as they raised the insensible

Murillo in their arms, and heard, afar off, from the wood-depths, a peal of maniac laughter.

But no one dreamed that the burned and scarred wretch, now flying wildly through gloomy forest-paths, had been, one hour before, that loving and light-hearted youth—Lorenzo, the artist.

CHAPTER X.

POMFRET'S FRIENDS.

ZUMOZIN the Serf, standing over our unconscious friend, the Yankee, and listening to the distant sounds of conflict in the valley, did not observe another figure advancing up the pass, until a drawn sword flashed before his eyes, coupled with a voice pronouncing the word :

“Surrender !”

The Peon threw out his arms, which had been crossed on his breast, showing by that movement both his humble garb and weaponless person ; whereupon the assailant dropped his sword's point.

“Who are you ?” demanded the new-comer.

Zumozin replied, briefly :

“A slave !”

But, at the same time, he drew up his stately figure with an air that seemed to contradict the servile admission.

“What do you here ?”

“I dream that I am free,” answered the Peon, bitterly.

“Beware how you sport with my question. Know you aught of Marani's robbers ? Has no one passed you ? But why do I ask ? You are, doubtless, a spy, posted here by the brigands. Confess, instantly, or you die !”

Saying this, the stranger seized Zumozin's collar and placed his sword-point within an inch of the serf's heart. But no sign of fear was manifested by the defenceless man.

“I am unarmed, as you see ; alone likewise. Were I a robber I should not be without friends.”

The other again withdrew his weapon ; but at this juncture

his eyes fell upon the prostrate form of Pomfret, who remained, as he sunk, quite insensible.

"Ha! slave, as you call yourself, what is this at your feet?"

"Señor, you ask what I can not answer. 'Tis but a little while since, from the rocks above, I beheld this man flying, as if from enemies. He sunk upon this spot, and I descended to assist him just as you yourself emerged from the pass. Whether he fled from your pursuit is best known to yourself. Señor, you know all that I can tell you, save that my name is Anselmo Zumozin, as yours is Don Ferrardo Nunez."

"You know me, then?"

"Only as a serf may know the proud cavalier who dashes past his hut on a prancing steed. Perhaps I deserve punishment for having marked you oftentimes, and envied, perchance, your war-steed and broad-sword. Ha! ha! Señor! think of a slave envying a cavalier like Don Ferrardo!"

The soldier felt a thrill pass through his frame as the Peon's wild, half-scornful laugh broke on the night air. But, before he could reply, the man had stopped suddenly, and was lifting the head of Pomfret Putnam.

"This man is not dead, Señor. He breathes—his heart beats!"

"Here is a flask of wine," said Nunez, producing a silver canteen. "Give the wretch a drink; though, if he be one of Marani's cut-throats, you will but save him from the gallows."

"He is a foreigner by his complexion," answered the Peon, applying the officer's flask to Pomfret's lips.

The reviving liquor had an immediate effect. Opening his eyes, our Yankee looked from one to the other of the faces above him, and then, in his own language, murmured, dolefully:

"Ingens ag'in, by thunder!"

"Friend, have courage. You are in no danger," said the serf, astonishing his countryman, Don Ferrardo, by addressing the stranger in English.

At the same time poor Pomfret started suddenly upright on hearing the familiar tongue. He started at Zumozin as if incredulous of his own hearing, and then spoke feebly:

"Say that over ag'in, hoss. Jes' you speak that ar' blessed language once more—now do." The tears gathered in

Pomfret's eyes, and began to roll down his bronzed cheeks. "Jerusalem!" he murmured, "I hain't heerd that sweet and natral tongue so long that it's jest like hum to meet you, stranger. 'Deed it is now, I tell you." Poor Pomfret, overcome by his feelings, broke down at once.

"Who are you, Señor?" asked Don Ferrardo, while Zumozin's dark lip curved with a smile.

"Who be I? Well, stranger, I'm a free and enlightened citizen of the States—that's what I be."

"A North American—of the United States?" said the Peon.

"Yes, hoss; and you're the first civilized feller I've come across since I left Vera Cruz. It does me good to hear you talk, now. Give us your hand, I want to shake."

"But why are you, a stranger, here at this hour? Have you traveling companions near?"

"Not a critter. To be sure, I've got friends—lots on 'em; and they'll be after them yaller robbers with a sharp stick one of these days, now I tell you."

"This must be the man whom Marani's rascals were hanging not long ago," said Don Ferrardo, noticing the rope which still dangled from the Yankee's neck.

"To be sure I be," responded Pomfret, comprehending the officer's remark. "I cal'late I had a smart run for life, anyhow."

"The man may be of use to us," mused Nunez; and then, turning to the Peon, whose knowledge of a foreign language, as well as singular demeanor, so little comporting with his station as a serf, now began to excite his curiosity, he asked:

"What said you was your name?"

"I am called Anselmo Zumozin."

"Well, then, Anselmo Zumozin, oblige me by taking charge of this American, if such he be, and let him be brought to our barracks when he recovers sufficiently. Can the man walk?"

"Well, I reckon," answered Pomfret, whose strength and courage had been wonderfully stimulated by the soldier's wine; and rising as he spoke, he followed Ferrardo, who was himself preceded by the Peon. But they had descended only a few steps, when they were confronted by a half-dozen rude figures, advancing at a rapid pace.

"Yaller-skins, by hokey!" ejaculated Pomfret.

"The robbers!" exclaimed Don Ferrardo, raising his sword, as he scanned the dusky figures, and saw that they approached with leveled carabines.

"No, Señor, they are friends," interposed the Peon, calmly. And, advancing a few paces, he made a slight gesture, and spoke a few hurried words, which neither Don Ferrardo nor Pomfret could interpret. In a moment every carabine was lowered, and the half-dozen grim sentinels, ranging themselves on one side of the narrow passway, permitted the serf and his two companions to descend without molestation, though to do so they were obliged to brush against the doublets of the brigands.

They kept on toward the valley, the Peon keeping the lead, until they reached the borders of the wood, through which now the glare of Murillo's house was distinctly visible.

"Here we part," said Zumozin to the officer.

"Not so. I must know more of you."

"I am a slave, and at my master's disposal, not my own."

"And who is your master?"

"Juan Garcia, the alcalde."

"Garcia! I know him well."

"So do I, Señor. Adieu."

"Stay. First tell me how it is you have authority over these brigands. Why did they not attack us?"

"That you may learn at some future time, Señor."

"Nay, you go not till I have—"

"If you wish to see me again, seek me among Juan Garcia's slaves."

With this speech, Zumozin turned abruptly away, and, before the soldier could make an effort to detain him, darted back among the trees. Don Ferrardo hesitated a moment, and then, bidding the Yankee follow, crossed the road toward the farm-house. It was at the very moment he reached the open space, in view of the building, that the wild form of Lorenzo, the artist, appeared emerging from the roof.

Nunez beheld the maniac's wild leap, and saw the aged Murillo place himself before him. Then he heard the mad laugh of the unhappy youth, and darting forward, reached the group of soldiers and servants in time to see the stricken

father of Inez lying senseless on the green, while the timbers of his roof-tree, crackling and smoldering, fell like a surge among the fiery ruins.

The red gleam which had illumined sky and forest now faded to a dusky brown, and shadows began to creep over the fallen home of Murillo the Rich!

CHAPTER XI.

IMPRISONED AND HATED.

IN the mean time, Inez, borne rapidly through the forest, had opened her eyes, and recovered sufficient consciousness to perceive her situation. It was her sudden shriek at this discovery which Don Ferrardo Nunez heard. But Gomez only wound the muffler closer, and quickened his pace amid the difficult defiles.

The tumult near the farm-house was speedily lost in the distance, though the bright light, which shot up behind him, apprised the flying robber of the work of destruction. He kept on, however, with unflagging speed, till he reached a circuitous defile conducting along the brink of a dangerous chasm to the outer barrier of the brigands' retreat. Here a solitary sentinel responded to the watchword, and passing him, Gomez soon reached the outer cavern, whence a dim and scarcely perceptible light gleamed faintly out upon the darkness.

Entering this place, he deposited his exhausted captive upon a rough couch formed of the skins of wild animals, and called, in a loud tone :

"Berta !"

The girl, to whom the reader already has been introduced, answered the summons. Emerging from the interior of the cave, she came toward the couch.

"Berta, make haste. Bring wine and refreshments for this lady. She is the Captain's prize ! Dost not hear, child ?"

"The Captain's prize ! Where, then, is he ?" asked the

girl, quickly, the color mounting to her face and neck. "Where is Giacomo?"

"At the farm-house of Murillo, in the valley, whither I must straightway return. Take good care of this lady, Berta, as you value our Captain's favor. He is head over ears in love with her, by the mass! See to her at once, good child."

Berta paused, as if in thought, and then withdrew to procure the refreshments, while Gomez paced the cave.

Inez, meantime, remained motionless upon the couch. The moon was still shining brightly upon the open area before the cavern's mouth, and there a sentry paced up and down, his carabine gleaming in the silvery rays.

"Hot work, Gomez?" remarked this sentinel, eager for news concerning the expedition. "Were not the Captain's orders so strict, and were not one afraid of the fate of that poor old sot, Spaltro, I would even leave my post, and go back with you. There'll be plenty of plunder—eh, comrade?"

"Doubtless. And you'll get your share of it. Whatever we may say of our Captain, he takes care of every one. No one fares badly who obeys orders."

"Ay, Gomez, it's very well for the Captain to order; but it's hard to be cooped up in a cavern here so long as I've been, without an adventure to keep my poniard bright. I wanted to go to the valley to-night, but says the Captain, with that confounded way of his: 'Stay at home, comrade. Your turn will come next.'"

"So it will," returned Gomez. "This booty of Murillo's will make us all rich, comrade, and we can dash away like *grandees* for a twelvemonth. Take my word for it, neither *monte* nor *pulque* can ruin us for a year to come."

"The saints be praised for that, at least," returned the sentinel.

Berta now came from the inner cave, bringing a flask of wine, together with some dried fruits; and Gomez, with a renewed injunction upon the girl to take care of the Captain's prize, loaded his carabine once more, looking carefully at the priming, and departed hurriedly from the retreat. The sentinel resumed his rounds, and Berta was left alone with Inez.

It is now time to describe this girl of the "Outlaw's Mount."

In person, she was below the medium size ; feet and hands exquisitely small, and every movement graceful and lightsome as a young antelope's. Her round, compact waist and scarcely developed bust, might serve as models of natural symmetry, and a charming oval face, fringed with glossy black ringlets, that fell in masses over her neck, was made up of irregular but expressive features.

No one of the band had ever seen Berta, without remarking the sunny smile that often broke all over her olive face ; and every body said, in the little brigand world where she dwelt, that Berta was the happiest child who ever wandered through a forest, or climbed high rocks like a wild kid.

The girl, after the departure of Gomez, stood, half on tiptoe, by the couch. Neither smile was on her lip, nor gladness in her eye. Her dark blood had mounted to her forehead, and swollen every vein into distinctness ; her large eyes blazed with intense though suppressed passion.

"Loves her !" she murmured, wildly clasping her hands to her breast. "What right has—"

She drew nearer to the couch, and stooping beside it, drew away the cloak which concealed the features of Murillo's daughter. Then she arose to her feet.

"Ah ! she *must* be beautiful ; *very* beautiful indeed, if Marani loves her. Oh, I dare not look upon her face."

The cavern was lighted by the smoky glare of a lamp suspended from the rocky roof. An attempt had been made to give even this outer cave, which was a sort of vestibule to the robbers' retreat, some features of comfort, and even of rude elegance. On the rough wall were hung the skins of animals slain in the chase, mingled with crossed carabines, gilded crucifixes and naked swords, interspersed with numberless details of feathers, rosettes, and other ornaments which go to make up the tinsel of a robber's paraphernalia.

At the head of the couch was a narrow, arched opening in the rock, half concealed by a faded crimson curtain, looped up with discolored fringe. This was the entrance to a private portion of the interior cavern, sacred to the use of the brigand chief, Marani.

On the opposite side of the vestibule was a wider aperture, leading to a range of subterranean apartments, occupied as

kitchens, larders, armories, and dormitories by the wild wretches who composed the band.

Berta pressed her hand to her forehead, and stamped upon the ground, as if to summon new determination; then she bent down once more, and slowly withdrew the mantle from the face of Inez. The light from the suspended lamp, falling upon the captive's countenance, disclosed its full classic beauty, more striking, if possible, from the motionless and deathlike insensibility of the unhappy maiden.

"Ah, Holy Virgin, she is beautiful—*too* beautiful!" cried the girl, with a smothered groan, as she gazed upon the fainting lady. "Oh, she has stolen his heart from me, and I am lost, lost forever!"

Berta flung herself upon the floor of the cave, and sobbed bitterly.

Inez, partially recovering from the swoon, opened her eyes, and gazed fearfully around the apartment. A vague memory of the last hour's events wandered through her brain, but it found no tangible point whereon to rest, save the indistinct confusion of her seizure and the noise of the attack. Slowly, however, her eyes became accustomed to the place, and, raising her head, she beheld the open mouth of the cave, through which a portion of the heavens was discernible. She also caught the sound of Berta's sobbing, and glancing downward, beheld the prostrate girl. A cry of alarm escaped her lips. Berta instantly started to her feet. Dashing back her disordered hair, she stared wildly into the captive's frightened countenance.

"Who are you, beautiful devil?" she shrieked, passionately. "What do you here? Tell me, or I will kill you!"

"Alas! Señora, I know not how I was brought hither. I am most unhappy."

"You speak falsely. You have come, wicked, beautiful creature—you will be *his* bride!—Marani's bride! And I am to be *deserted*! Woman, I will kill you!"

"Alas! you are deceived. I know not what you mean. Who is the Marani of whom you speak? I know him not."

And Inez shrunk from the fierce gaze of the brigand girl, who had lifted her hand menacingly, as if she longed to strike her rival.

"Marani? what say you? Beware how you speak falsely to me. I know how you proud ladies win the hearts of men, and count it a light thing. But you shall never be Marani's wife! No—no—no!"

"Alas! I know not your Marani."

"It is false, oh, wicked woman! Have I not beheld him at the gate of Murillo's house, and did they not tell me he was to be the husband of Inez? But that shall *never* be. You are here, and in my power, and you shall die—die, beautiful demon that you are, to steal Marani from me."

The low yet vehement tones with which the passionate Berta poured forth her speech, penetrated poor Inez with an indefinable terror. Nothing that this strange girl uttered was intelligible to her, and yet she could not help feeling that she was in some manner compromised with the Marani of whom Berta spoke.

But, as the flashing eyes of the speaker grew yet more angry, the captive maiden shrunk away toward the curtain, which, as we have seen, hung over the aperture near the head of the couch. Berta perceived the movement.

"Ha!" she exclaimed; "you would escape me. You would fly to your lover's chamber, and there await his return. But you shall not enter there! Never, *never*!"

Suiting her action to the word, she drew a silver-mounted pistol from her girdle, and pointed it at the bosom of Inez.

"Oh, mercy, mercy! do not kill me! Señora, I am innocent. What do you seek?"

"Your life," cried the frenzied girl.

"Do not kill me. In the name of the Blessed Virgin, spare me! My father, my poor father would die!"

She was answered by a bitter laugh. As her hands, raised in entreaty, strove to protect her bosom, the pistol exploded, and she fell back on the couch.

A volume of smoke rolled around the vaulted apartment. Suddenly, without the cave, was heard the report of a musket, and immediately after, persons rushed through the aperture.

Berta stood, with the discharged pistol in her right hand, while her left was pressed against the breast of Inez. And as she withdrew her hand, and held it up in the light of the lamp, those who had entered could see that it was crimson-stained.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO THE OUTLAWS ARE.

THE approach to the retreat of Marani's band was a perilous one, mainly on account of narrow shelves which formed the path in many places, but most difficult, because of the devious crooks, ascents, and abrupt turnings, which a member of the band only would be certain of following, and which hitherto had always preserved the brigands from pursuit, even when, at times, some daring expedition of the band had stimulated the closest search on the part of neighboring authorities.

In some places the mountain path afforded scarcely a foothold, and an adventurous passenger, if he dared to glance downward, would discover himself poised on a precipice, a thousand feet of chasm below him, in which roared the black waters of a torrent boiling over its bed of rocks. In such spots as these, a single stone hurled from above would suffice to sweep a column of pursuers into eternity. Indeed, the greatest caution was necessary when a solitary person attempted the ascent of such narrow ledges; and, to guard against mischances, the robbers had hung ropes from the cliffs above, which, being caught hold of as they dangled, enabled the climber to swing himself with comparative ease around the dangerous abutments of slippery rock. Those ropes were sometimes concealed in the thick foliage of the stunted trees which grew on the very edge of the cliff, but usually were thrown above, as occasion required, and carefully drawn up whenever the band were secure in their fortress.

So accustomed, however, were the daring followers of Marani to scaling and descending these footways, that an accident had never befallen one, either by daylight or the less reliable beams of the moon, which latter were the usual guiding-lights of their expeditions. In dark or stormy nights no enterprise ever was projected, as the risks in escaping to this mountain hold were far too great to be rashly encountered.

It was on such moonlight evenings as the previous one, marked by the assault and destruction of Murillo's house, that Marani's band were wont to descend silently to the valley roads, attack and plunder a caravan, and then dispersing, each with his booty, regain the cave with great celerity, there to collect and divide the plunder under arbitration of the chief.

We have seen with what facility the brigand, Gomez, though encumbered with the fainting Inez, had mounted to the retreat. Let us now follow him on his second departure to rejoin his comrades in the valley.

Like many of the band to which he belonged, Gomez was of the Mestizo race, deriving its origin from a union of the white inhabitants with Indians and half-breeds. In no country are distinctions of blood and consequent variety of character more apparent than in Mexico. While the Guadalupinos and Creoles have enjoyed by turns the power and immunities of an aristocracy, the Aborigines, Mestizoes, Mulattoes and Blacks, in all their various shades, have always, since the Conquest, occupied inferior grades of life, as "hewers of wood and drawers of water;" or else, breaking from the restraint of a weak Government, have arrayed themselves against the laws, and uplifted, like Ishmaelite, their hands against all men.

The great passion in Mexico is gaming; the great pleasure, idleness. From the highest to the lowest, there is scarcely a man who will not stake his last dollar on a game of chance. Gambling is, indeed, the vice of the nation. Offices, emoluments, reputation, are the sport of the hazardous politics, which partake as much of the grand passion as does *monte* itself. The subaltern stakes his life in a plot against his General; the General risks his in a conspiracy, whose object is the Presidential chair. All ranks gamble, and are, by chance, ruined or enriched.

And to the spendthrift Creole or Gochupin, who rises from a gambling-table without a coin in his pocket, or to the broken, officer, who has lost both cash and caste, there is one way always left to retrieve their shattered fortunes, and this is what, in English slang, would be called "the road." It is a very easy undertaking to organize a temporary association for

brigandage in Mexico. While there are dashing Creoles ruined in the capital, there are hundreds of poverty-stricken and discontented Mestizoes in the valleys and provincial towns, ever ready to embark in an enterprise which promises pay, whether it be robbery or insurrection; whether they be summoned to arms by a revolutionist's *pronunciamento*, or called by a secret word to some brigand's rendezvous. In most cases, the band thus formed has for its object the sudden surprise of a caravan, and, in general, when this purpose is achieved, the amateur freebooters disperse, to dissipate their booty at *monte*, the national game of hazard, or in drinking *pulque*, the national beverage. But, in not a few instances, well-ordered and desperate banditti have been known to set the Government at defiance for a series of years, and at length be brought to terms only by a general amnesty, and perhaps enrollment in the service of the State.

Such bands as these, however, are organized by degrees, and are composed of various materials. While a portion are men of the wildest passions and habits, who adopt the profession *con amore*, there are other portions made up of unfortunates, who have been driven by wrong and tyranny into red-handed opposition to the laws.

Among these latter may be classed the native Indian brigands, who, having escaped from a state of forced servitude, like peonage, or from abject poverty, find themselves outlawed at once, and embrace a life which promises, at the least, a wild independence. Many of the Mestizoes, too, as well as the pure Indians, cling to the singular customs and superstitions of the ancient race, and their religion is a blending of Aztec traditional ceremonies with the observances of the Romish Church.

As said, the Indians, unlike the Gochupins, or European inhabitants, and the Creoles, never obtained sway in political affairs; and this is true of them considered as a class. Nevertheless, many instances have occurred of pure-blooded Indians attaining to high positions in the State, holding rank in civil and military affairs. These, however, are exceptions incident to peculiar individuals, and serve but to exhibit more forcibly the injustice which creates social distinctions on account of the accident of birth. Mexico owed, probably, as

much to the Indian and Mestizo portions of her citizens, during the struggle for independence, as to any other class. Guerrero, indeed, the first of her actual Presidents, and one of the bravest of her patriot commanders, was scarcely more a white than a negro in the quality of his blood. It is evident, therefore, that the inequality of political power is not the result of natural inferiority in the degraded classes, but rather the offspring of that injustice which repudiates all merit when opposed to prejudice.

A band of brigands, constituted of restless and ambitious spirits from all classes, with diverse motives and objects, requires, it may be imagined, some vigorous intelligence to control its operations, and not a little ingenuity to preserve the discipline essential to its safety.

Such a band was that of the "Outlaw's Mount;" and its chief, Giacomo Marani, possessed the qualities necessary to leadership in an eminent degree. Marani was neither a Mexican nor a Spaniard. His first breath was drawn among the Apennines, and his passions and incentives were the offspring of an Italian education. Those who affected to know somewhat of his history, averred that he had once been noted as a terrible outlaw of the Abruzzo. Some said he had escaped the guillotine by a miracle, or by the agency of magic. There were not a few who would swear that he was under the especial protection of the Arch Enemy himself, who, for some hidden purpose, prospered all his undertakings. At the present time, however, it would appear that the fiend had deserted his *protégé*; for Marani was a prisoner of his old enemies, the soldiers, with little apparent chance of escape.

Gomez lightly descended the rocky defiles, swiftly skirting the narrow ledges, reaching, in a brief space of time, the crowded valley. Though he no longer heard the reports of arabines, he could still perceive, glimmering faintly over the trees, the glare cast by the burning farm-house.

Suddenly his ears caught the tread of footsteps rapidly nearing him through the woods, and presently a number of his robber comrades appeared. They were Indians of the pure breed, and not, like himself, a Mestizo.

"Whither, comrades?" asked Gomez, quickly.

"To the mountain. We are beaten, and our Captain is a prisoner."

"Carrambo! Marani taken? But he will escape. They can not keep our Captain in their dungeons."

"That may be, Gomez; but let us look out for ourselves, that we do not dangle in the market-place of Puebla. A curse on all Murillos, and a double curse on those misbegotten soldiers, say I. Come on, comrades. To the mount."

"Stay," cried the Mestizo. "Though our Captain be a prisoner he may be rescued. Who among you will return with me to the farm-house? Look! here are more of us, comrades all."

As Gomez spoke, another squad of the robbers approached with hurried steps. But to the Mestizo's proposition all turned a deaf ear. It was quite evident that the marauders were panic-stricken, and magnified the numbers of their foes.

"So you will leave our Captain to be shot or strangled, eh, comrades?"

"There's not much danger of that," spake a young, oval-faced Indian. "The Captain commands assistance that we can not."

A murmur of assent attested the belief of the other Indians in this assertion. Gomez shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll bear me witness, comrades, that I desired to rescue our Captain?"

"Ay, but it is useless, Gomez."

"Very well, comrades; let us, then, return to the cave. The Captain may soon follow us—who knows?"

"Ay, who knows?" echoed the young Indian.

"I know that he will not return, at least to-night. The soldiers will take good care of him," said a new voice; and at the same moment a tall figure glided from the shadows of the wood.

Gomez grasped his carabine, but the Indians, with whom he was surrounded, recognized the new-comer by a spontaneous salutation.

"Ha, Zumozin, is it you?" cried Gomez. "You come among us, by St. Jago, like a ghost." Then in an undertone,

the Mestizo muttered : " These Indians are like spirits ; you never know when they are at your shoulder."

" I saw from the thicket that your Captain was a prisoner," answered the serf. " He is in the hands of his deadly enemy, La Vega. As for yourselves, I would advise an immediate return to the cave, for a force will to-morrow invade the mountain. This night an officer of yonder garrison demanded of me the path to your retreat."

" And you—" commenced Gomez.

" I offered to conduct him thither," returned Zumozin.

" By St. Jago ! What ? betray us ?"

" I offered to conduct him to the Mount," said the serf. " I did not promise to bring him back."

" Ha, ha !" the Indians laughed, and Gomez, stroking his beard, said :

" You are a strange fellow, Zumozin. However, we will take your advice and seek our retreat. I'm of opinion that if Captain Marani does not return, these copper-faced comrades of mine will elect you to be our Chief—so I'll even begin to obey now !"

This was said in a gruff tone, but the Indians who heard it seemed to manifest some satisfaction at the idea conveyed. But Zumozin said, haughtily :

" I am no robber—though I may be worse ! Adieu !"

Then, turning on his heel, he departed as abruptly as he came ; while Gomez and the rest continued their flight to the Mount.

The solitary sentinel who remained on guard at the cave, after Gomez had set out for the farm-house, was extremely ill-contented with his situation. He could not help reflecting that it was more exciting and professionally respectable to be handling old Murillo's dollars and emptying his wine jugs—the occupation, as he firmly believed, of his distant comrades at that period—than to be keeping guard over a cave and a woman, with nobody to converse with, and scarce wine enough to wet his lips. He leaned, therefore, upon his gun, and cogitated gloomily.

" Gomez and the rest are doubtless enjoying themselves, it is true," muttered the discontented robber ; and here am I, one of the bravest of all, left to—"

What further the worthy might have said, was lost, for, at this moment, an unearthly cry pierced his ears, and before he could level his carabine, a man leaped from the thick woodland, and dashed full against him. The gun exploded in his hands, and at the same instant a pistol-shot resounded from the cave.

Almost at the same instant the open space before the cavern became a scene of the utmost confusion. A throng of fugitive brigands, led by Gomez, came rushing through the woods, while the unfortunate sentinel, wounded by the premature explosion of his piece, lay writhing with pain upon the ground. At the mouth of the cave, two of the robbers were struggling to master a wild-looking being, whose features and form were scorched and black with fire, and who uttered the most frightful cries.

Two other brigands, emerging from the cavern, supported the form of a woman, while behind, grasping the discharged pistol with which she had wounded her rival, appeared the half-crazed Berta.

In vain the strong-handed mountaineers struggled with the wild figure they had seized, and attempted to restrain him. He dashed them aside with the strength of a madman, and, bounding across the open area, sunk exhausted upon the turf, his glaring eye fixed upon the pallid face of Inez Murillo.

A sad finale for the Serenade of Lorenzo!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TIGER IN A CAGE.

"CURSES light upon the villain! Why did they not cast him into the flames?" was the exclamation of Antonio de la Vega, who, with bandaged and blistered body, lay upon his bed, listening to the rehearsal, by his friend Ferrardo, of the last night's events, which had taken place subsequently to his own mishap.

You forget, Antonio, that the brigand surrendered to our

men, and was disarmed. He is, moreover, a prisoner, and incapable of doing further harm."

"Ay, indeed—a prisoner? Perdition! Had I not fallen upon his sword, the villain should never have survived to be afforded the chance for life which a prisoner always has. I tell you, Ferrardo, this Marani will escape us yet."

"Impossible."

"Did you not inform me that Juan Garcia, the alcalde, had arrived, and that he is even now in the prison of this brigand?"

"I did—but of what consequence is that? The alcalde is no friend of the robber."

"No; but the alcalde, as a magistrate, possesses authority to order his removal hence; and should Marani have gold to purchase his liberty, an alcalde might be bribed. I have heard of such things, Ferrardo."

"But the law, Antonio! Garcia would hardly dare to tamper with justice in the case of so notorious a robber as this?"

"You talk of that of which you know nothing," answered La Vega. "Law in Mexico is made for the convenience, not the guidance, of magistrates. Juan Garcia, the alcalde, is the most powerful civil functionary within a score of leagues. Who is to call *him* to account, my good Señor?"

"You may be right, Antonio. But trust me, I will keep my eyes open. For yourself, let not your mind be agitated by dwelling on our unfortunate expedition. Your wound requires rest, or it may become serious. Fear not that Marani will escape; for, by St. Juan! if he should attempt it, I myself will be his executioner!"

"Stay, Ferrardo. Has naught been learned concerning the fate of Murillo's daughter?"

"I have despatched soldiers to scour the mountain. Marani's band is completely dispersed."

"And Murillo?"

"The old man is here, safe from injury, but inconsolable for the loss of his child. He believed her dead, at first, but is now assured that she is not. The woman whom we beheld carried off, and whom I pursued so fruitlessly, was, without doubt, your Inez."

"That's some consolation," muttered La Vega. "The proud girl will experience the tender mercies of robbers, in return for her rejection of a soldier."

With this reflection, the wounded Captain settled back on his pillow. Don Ferrardo left the apartment, proceeding to the barrack guard-room, beyond which was the prison wherein Marani and other captured brigands were confined.

"Where is the Señor Garcia?" inquired Nunez of a soldier, on entering the guard-room.

"He is examining the brigand, Marani."

"They have been a long time together?"

"For an hour at least, Captain," answered the soldier.

"The devil take Garcia!" thought Nunez; but he kept the thought to himself, and, walking to a window, looked out upon the valley.

This military post, at which the two officers were stationed, was situated, as we have seen, at the head of the valley, and commanding a view of the surrounding country for a wide distance. It was upon the direct or "National" highway leading from the seacoast to the city of Mexico, and was so well chosen that it could be made a formidable barrier against the advance of an enemy.

Don Ferrardo could behold, stretching far beneath him, fertile plains, dotted with farm-houses, and broken by abrupt heights which, like the "Outlaw's Mount," were extremely difficult of access to unfamiliar feet. Below in the distance appeared the roofs of a well-defended city, glittering afar beneath the rays of the sun. This city was Puebla, one of the strongest places on the route from Vera Cruz to Mexico.

Far off to the right, the officer could catch occasional glimpses of a river flashing in the sunbeams, and winding from the base of a lofty mountain many leagues distant; but, though he surveyed the wide expanse of valley, hill and plain, he took little note of the beauty of either. His thoughts were intent upon his previous night's adventure.

"A singular fellow, that Zumozin," said he to himself, as the recollection of his encounter with the Peon crossed his mind. "I can not account for his influence over the brigands — unless, indeed, he is one of them. I must see Garcia respecting this 'slave' of his; yes, I must question Garcia."

guessed my thoughts? One thing is certain, however, he knows not how well this fair niece loves Ferrardo Nunez, in spite of his teeth."

With this reflection, which seemed to relieve the Captain not a little, he turned from the barrack-room, and calling a servant, ordered his horse to be immediately saddled and brought to the door.

While he is waiting for the steed, let us follow Juan Garcia on his homeward road through the valley.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BRACE OF PATRIOTS.

MOUNTED on a gayly caparisoned mule, the alcalde ambled leisurely down the road, keeping to the left as much as possible, in order to avail himself of the shelter afforded by wooded heights against the powerful sunbeams.

The house of Garcia was situated at less distance from the barracks than that which had been lately the residence of Murillo. It was surrounded by a tolerably thick settlement of tenantry and dependents of the alcalde, whereas that of the father of Inez was isolated by a stretch of woods and rocks from any other habitation. Garcia was, in truth, one of the largest landholders in that part of the country, as well as an extensive speculator in mines, and a man, likewise, who was reputed to exercise no little influence in political affairs at the capital. Certain it was, that his occasional visits to the seat of government, together with mysterious interviews which often took place at his *hacienda* between himself and high dignitaries of the State, were supposed, by those who affected judgment in such matters, to be intimately connected with subsequent governmental changes.

The political character of the alcalde had never been broadly developed. Many people recollected the time when he entertained Don Augustine Iturbide at his mansion, and was supposed to know more about that unhappy monarch's

schemes than any other Mexican. Others were sure that Juan Garcia had been the main-stay of Guerrero's administration, while others again were ready to wager that the worthy alcalde was Don Lopez de Santa Anna's bosom friend and adviser.

But, Juan Garcia was a being of the most impenetrable secretiveness, and whatever might be surmised, very little was known concerning his character or actions. He smiled with the same bland expression on everybody, and everybody acknowledged that he possessed amiable manners, though all experienced an unaccountable uneasiness in his presence.

Juan Garcia kept on his road, his mule carefully picking her way, as she descended the slope of the valley. The alcalde was apparently immersed in reflections, for his small and usually restive eyes were wonderfully quiet and subdued; so much so, indeed, that their glances failed to encounter the shadow which was thrown broadly across his path from the figures of a horse and rider, awaiting his approach beneath a roadside tree, until the voice of the latter hailed, in a round, full tone:

"Ho! Garcia!"

The alcalde drew rein as quickly as if he had beheld the edge of a precipice, but recovering his self-possession immediately, exclaimed:

"Ha! Don Mariano, here?"

"At your good service, Señor," returned the horseman "that is, if you will ride to the *hacienda* at once. I have but a few moments to spare, and have ridden far to meet you. Let us go forward."

"I was but this moment thinking of you, Don Mariano," said the alcalde, quickening the pace of his mule to keep up with the stranger's horse. "Indeed, it was your business, General, that called me forth to-day."

"You have been to yonder station?" asked the stranger, in a soft tone of voice.

"I have, Don Mariano."

"Captain Antonio de la Vega commands there?"

"Jointly with Captain Ferrardo Nunez," replied Garcia.

"La Vega, however, was severely wounded last night, and—"

"How! ~~And what?~~"

"No, General; a skirmish with the robbers, who infest this district. They assaulted and burned a farm-house, but were repulsed by La Vega and a party of his men. Their Captain, a noted brigand, was taken."

"Humph! I passed the burned farm-house, methinks, on my way hither. But you remarked, Garcia, that you were out upon my business. What have I to do with those robbers?"

"*Perhaps* much," answered Garcia, with his peculiar smile, his glittering eyes at the same time dancing over the other's features. "Perhaps much! These brigands are useful, sometimes—*very* useful."

"I understand, my worthy friend," replied the stranger. "Report has often said that Señor Juan Garcia finds robbers of great utility at times."

"And so may Don Mariano," said the alcalde. "In certain stages of politics, as well as commercial affairs, one need not be too choice of instruments."

"You are right, Garcia," returned the other quickly; and then for a few moments he preserved silence; while the alcalde rode by his side, carelessly patting the neck of his mule, though at the same time his bead-like eyes were covertly scrutinizing Don Mariano's countenance.

At last, suddenly starting, as if breaking a reverie, the horseman spoke:

"This brigand—who is he?"

"Giacomo Marani."

"Ha! He was once well known in Mexico. Don Lucas Guzman and he were suspected of—"

"It is the same, General. Your memory is good. Don Lucas and Marani were known to be good friends."

"A dangerous man—this Marani."

"Dangerous as an enemy, but a serviceable friend, I should fancy, General. At least, Don Lucas found him such."

"And what do you propose, my good Garcia?"

"Yonder was the farm-house burned last night," said the alcalde, as they reached a point in the road from which could be seen the still smoking ruins of Murillo's mansion. "It will give you an idea of how Marani executes his work. Suppose, General, that we turn off toward the ruins. It is a

place where one may converse in safety. These thick woods often have ears, and some things are as well kept secret."

"You say well, Garcia. Let us approach the place," answered he who has been called Don Mariano, spurring his horse toward the ruined buildings. The alcalde's mule kept pace, and, in a brief space of time, the two had diverged from the main road, and arrived in the vicinity of the ruin.

It was now noon; the air was sultry, and a dead stillness reigned over the scene. The dependents of Murillo had sought refuge in a distant part of the farmer's possessions. The mansion and out-buildings were completely destroyed, nothing now meeting the eye but blackened and tottering rafters, where, yesterday, stood a peaceful cluster of houses. A few dull wreaths of smoke curled upward from the smoldering fragments; and, as Garcia and his companion rode around the walls, a breath of hot air came from the still burning foundation of the building.

But all was silent as the grave beneath the bright sunbeams. Naught was visible but the tokens of destruction.

"What was this man's object?" asked Don Mariano, as he contemplated the scene.

"Plunder, doubtless," answered Garcia; "though I have learned that Murillo's daughter was carried off by the band."

"Atrocious!" murmured Don Mariano.

"*Very* atrocious!" echoed Garcia. "Nevertheless, General, this Marani is just the man for our emergency."

"Well, then, Garcia," cried Don Mariano, turning his head and fixing a keen glance upon the alcalde's face, "let us hear your suggestion. What do you propose in my emergency, as you term it?"

"First, tell me, Don Mariano, if you have not the support of twenty thousand soldiers, *provided*—"

"Provided I pay for them? It is true," answered Don Mariano.

"And to do this, you must have money?"

"That is equally true."

"Marani can give you the money."

"What say you? A brigand prisoner! Ah! as the price of his liberty?"

"Not *quite* so cheaply as that, General. Nevertheless

Marani can procure you wherewith to replenish the military chest, and enable you to carry out your project, which I take to be—excuse me, General—a new revolution.”

“You are sanguine, Garcia. Does not your zeal outrun your caution?”

“I am aware, General, that money wrought the Dictator’s fall. Your patriotism, Don Mariano, had a great deal to do with it, I confess; nevertheless, money, *money* was necessary. Now, then, as Santa Anna is out of the way, your patriotism is opposed to Herrera. More money (and patriotism of *course*,) can ruin *him*. Do I make out my case?”

“You are Juan Garcia.”

“Thank you, General, for the compliment. Now to Marani. He must provide the money.”

“By what means?”

“Listen, Señor. In three days, a large and valuable caravan will cross the mountains. I have certain advices of its approach. The traders have been unusually successful, and a heavy amount of specie is in their possession—enough doubtless, for your ‘emergency.’ It is true, these traders possess Government protections; but that, Don Mariano, will be of little avail against brigands.”

“I understand you, Garcia.”

“What is patriotism without money?”

“But are you sure of this Marani’s fidelity?”

“Entirely, though he must be allowed a fair share of *what* he earns.”

“You will stake your word that he does not betray us?”

“What has he to gain by such a course? No, General. In one week, or less, you will thank Juan Garcia for his foresight. In a month, Herrera will—”

“What is that! I heard a voice!” cried Don Mariano.

“It was but a loose stone detached,” answered the alcalde.

“See! yonder wall totters. Look! it is falling.”

As Garcia spoke, a fragment of blackened *adobe* fell from a portion of the ruined house, and presently a mass of shattered masonry surged downward, burying itself among the heaps of smoking bricks, and throwing a cloud of dust and smoke around and above.

And the next instant, half hidden by the thick atmosphere

the form of a man was dimly visible, and then disappeared behind the ruins. Garcia and his companion simultaneously uttered an exclamation, and then galloped around the corner of the house.

But no living thing was there, and all was quiet as before.

CHAPTER XV

A PROPHECY AND A FRIEND.

"I WILL win Garcia's fair niece, if there be any truth in woman," soliloquized Don Ferrardo Nunez, as he permitted his steed to walk leisurely along the road, after a hard gallop of a mile from his quarters. "I can see plainly that the crafty alcalde is ambitious, and will, doubtless, look coldly enough, when it comes to the point, upon a poor cavalier of fortune like myself. But the maiden—ay, *she* loves me, and, by St. Jago! methinks both of us are a match for the guardian!"

Thus run the Don's thoughts upon the niece of Garcia. With the fertile imagination of a young lover, he already pictured the consummation of all his wishes. Little cared the light-hearted soldier of the opposition of a dozen Garcias so long as he felt himself beloved by the lady; therefore, nothing appeared easier to his mind than winning the Donna Isabella.

"Faith! why should I not turn my own mind to politics?" ruminated the young Captain. "'Where there's meat for one, there's meat for two,' says the proverb, and I see no reason why Ferrardo Nunez should not thrive on that which makes Garcia fat. I will begin to school myself now, and take note of things about me; and it shall go hard, but, between my sword and my brain, I'll find wherewith to secure my ends. Oh, for a right bloody war, where brave men might cut their path to honor! War! ay, that's the lottery for him whose purse is of the lightest," cried the young officer, making his horse suddenly bound beneath an emphatic stroke of the spur.

"War ~~is indeed~~ a great lottery," said a measured voice at

Don Ferrardo's elbow. The Captain drew rein quickly, and beheld, standing at the roadside, the figure of Zumozin the Serf.

"Ha! do we meet again!" cried the officer. "You are he whom—"

"Of whom Juan Garcia bade you *beware*," said the Serf, calmly. "Is it not strange that an alcalde should caution oldier against a poor slave?"

"In the devil's name, Zumozin, how knew you of this caution? Are you a wizard?"

"Should I be Garcia's *slave* if I had power to release myself?" said the Peon, bitterly. "I am no wizard, Don Ferrardo, yet I can perchance predict *your* destiny.

"I should not object to that, Sir Peon, provided always the destiny be a good one."

"It is such as but now formed the burden of your thoughts—blood—crime—misery!"

"An agreeable prospect, truly, Señor Zumozin. But you are wrong; such lugubrious subjects have not possessed my mind to-day."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Serf, with a vehemence that startled his hearer; "have they not, Don Ferrardo? What, then, was that *word* which broke from your lips, as if it were the utterance of your wildest impulse? *War—war!* Was it *that* you prayed for, Don Ferrardo Nunez? And is not war all that I have named—blood, crime, misery?"

The soldier was silent beneath the flashing eyes of the Peon.

"Such shall be your life," continued Zumozin.

"And with war will come, at least, honor," said Nunez. "Let the blood, the misery, be the lot of those who provoke and merit them—come what may, my sword shall be stained with no *crime*. But go on, prophet of my destiny. When shall be these wars of which you speak? For, by the sword of the Cid! my own steel is growing rusty for want of use!"

"It will come—nay, it is here now?" answered the Serf.

"Faith! there is little sign of war, with good-natured, peace-loving Herrera at the helm of state," said Nunez.

"And Don Mariano Paredes at the head of the army," cried the Peon, suddenly. "And Don Antonio Lopez de

Sanna Anna plotting at Havana. And Don Lucas Alaman mixing potions at—”

“Are you the devil himself?” interrupted Nunez, casting a look of intense curiosity upon the calm features of the Peon, who stood, with folded arms, on a slight bank at the roadside, so that his head was nearly level with that of the soldier on horseback. “You tell me you are a slave—a miserable bond-servant of the *alcalde Garcia*—yet I have heard you speak different tongues like a scholar, and here you talk of Generals, Presidents, and *Administradores*, as if you had been a statesman all your life. In the evil one’s name, what are you?”

“I shall speak no further, Don Ferrardo, if it pleases you not. But I predict war—*war*, that will plunge Mexico in mourning—that will depopulate her towns, ruin her commerce, massacre her sires, and outrage her daughters! Does the prediction satisfy you, Don Ferrardo?”

“And why, Zumozin, do you tell this to *me*? You surely talk not thus among Garcia’s servants?”

An expression of alarm for a moment spread over the Peon’s face, as he answered :

“Don Ferrardo, war is at our doors. Your path of destiny lies through fields of blood, through danger, and destruction ; where the demon of battle rages with fiercest fury, there will be the soldier Nunez ; and beside him, will be—”

“Whom?” gasped the young officer, strangely agitated by the demeanor and words of his singular companion. “*Who* will be beside me?”

“Zumozin the Serf!” was the Peon’s reply, almost whispered, but uttered in a tone which thrilled the very air around.

For some moments Don Ferrardo contemplated his companion with earnest attention. He scrutinized the expression of the Serf’s countenance, surveyed his manly form, and the singular grace which characterized his demeanor, and dwelt in recollection upon the curious traits that had thus far been developed in the man’s character. He remembered, likewise, Garcia’s words in regard to his servant, words which he could not but reflect had been evasive of his own question. In the end, he remained as much puzzled as ever.

“Your speech is strange!” at length spoke Don Ferrardo

to the Peon. "How can you be beside me, in the fierce battles which you predict? Are you not a serf, and does not the alcalde Garcia control your actions?"

Zumozin's eyes rested calmly on the soldier.

"I obey a higher power than Garcia will—one to which Don Ferrardo Nunez pays willing homage."

"How say you? I?"

"Even so, Señor. For in what would you not obey the lady Isabella?"

Had the Serf suddenly smitten the soldier's face, the latter could scarcely have exhibited greater surprise than at this simple question. The blood mounted hotly to his face, his hands trembled, and he seemed for a moment to be in danger of falling from his horse, so strangely did the mere mention of his lady's name affect him. It was not, indeed, her name, but rather the lips which uttered it, that caused such emotion,

"In the name of heaven, what do you mean, Serf? Zumozin, what have *you* to do with the lady Isabella?"

The Peon's head drooped, and his eyes sought the ground.

"Alas!" he murmured, "what, indeed, have I to do with the high-born and beautiful lady?" Then, in a moment changing his tone, and lifting his head, "Soldier!" he said, in the deep, earnest voice which was natural to him, "I, a serf—a slave—have yet the soul to feel gratitude. The lady Isabella has been kind to her uncle's slaves—I pity my brethren, and remember kindness."

The last was uttered with a subdued feeling which touched the heart of Don Ferrardo. The Peon continued:

"Soldier, I have long known that you love my master's noble niece. Did I deem you unworthy of her, I would not be here now, to say to you what I alone have learned—"

"Speak: what would you tell me?" cried the young officer, as the Peon paused for a moment.

"That she loves *you*!" said Zumozin, in a low voice.

Again Don Ferrardo started in his saddle, while his heart beat wilder than if he had heard the blast of a battle trumpet.

"Loves me? Isabella loves me? How know you this?"

"Señor, it is true! I know not if the noble lady has yet confessed it to herself; but, on my life, Señor, she loves you! Behold, then, why Zumozin the Serf has sought Don Ferrardo

Nunez. In gratitude to her whose kindness makes her very name worshiped among my fellow-slaves, I have sworn to devote myself to him she loves—to watch over his safety, to shield his life—if need be, to sacrifice my own in his behalf.’

The lofty tone of enthusiasm in which his declaration was uttered, the flashing, yet sorrowful eyes of the Peon raised to heaven as he spoke, while his majestic form towered upward, and his arm was outstretched, awakened all the generosity of Don Ferrardo’s nature. He leaned from his saddle, and, grasping the Serf’s hand, drew him to his bosom.

“Noble Zumozin !” he exclaimed, while tears gushed over his manly cheeks, “you shall be my friend, my brother. May God make me worthy of this devotion.”

The Serf clasped the soldier to his heart, and thus for a moment these two magnanimous men remained locked in each other’s embrace. Strangers till this moment, one thrill of sympathy had united them. The magnetism of true souls had made them one.

CHAPTER VI.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

THE noontide heats beat down upon the military station in the prison of which was now incarcerated the brigand chief, Marani. The guard-house, a heavy fronted building, just within the embankments which formed the rude defenses of the place, was apparently the coolest spot to be found, inasmuch as its doors were shaded by tall and thickly-branching trees, beneath whose shelter were seated several soldiers, discussing the never-failing topics of war, gaming, and robbery.

“What think you, comrade, will be done with this robber Marani?” drawled a lank specimen of the yellow Mexican warrior, removing from his mouth a cigar which he had been lazily puffing.

“The garote, undoubtedly,” replied another, who reclined at full length upon a patch of grass before the door. “Tis as

certain as fate ; though, for my part, I pity the wretch—he was always such a daring fellow.”

“ No doubt of that,” said a third soldier. “ Many’s the *conducta* he and his band have rifled, under your very noses, my comrades. To be sure, Marani was a gentlemanly brigand, and never injured an innocent escort when he could have the treasure without striking a blow. I shall weep, most certainly, when they pin his throat for him.”

“ So will not our Captain, La Vega,” remarked the first speaker. “ It is said he has a personal quarrel with the robber chief, and will never rest satisfied till Marani’s doom is sealed.”

“ I know all about *that*,” said the soldier, who lay upon the grass. “ There was a black-eyed Señorita in the case, and it was doubtful, at one time, whether our Captain or Marani would be the—”

“ Hush !—there is that loon of a Yankee whom the Captain, Nunez, has taken into confidence so suddenly. We had better be mute before him, comrades.”

As the soldier spoke, he pointed to the figure of Putnam Pomfret, which appeared at a short distance, approaching the guard-house from another quarter of the station, with as careless and sauntering pace as if the worthy adventurer were at the moment crossing a New England village green, instead of a Mexican *plaza*.

“ The fellow is a spy,” muttered the soldier addressed, watching the North American with no amiable expression upon his swart features. But Pomfret, as he reached the group, quietly drew a cigar from his pocket, and holding it out for a light toward the growling Mexican, remarked ;

“ I hope this ’ere terbacker a’nt p’isoned. They tell orful stories of sich things among your yeller chaps.”

Then, with a congratulatory grin, as he noticed the soldier lying at full length upon the grass, Putnam threw himself likewise beneath the shade-trees, and reaching out a handful of cigars, invited the others to accept them.

“ Take a smoke ! Fire up ! Guess they’re fust-raters, for I got ’em of the Captin’. That ar’ Captin’ Nunez is a natural-born hoss, no mistake. He and I take to one another jes’ like kittens—I tell you !”

"'Tis fortunate for you, Señor, that you are not sharing the dungeon of your friends, the brigands, instead of smoking our Captain's cigars at your ease," muttered one of the soldiers, gruffly. "I'll wager a dollar that this fellow knows more about Marani than is honest—what say you, comrades?" continued the speaker, appealing to the rest.

An assenting grunt was the response, but Pomfret, although he perfectly understood what the soldier said, was not inclined to take umbrage at the remark.

"Yaas!" at length drawled he, emitting a succession of smoke-rings from his open mouth. "It's jes' as you say, yaller-skin! 'Twas kinder owin' to me that the brigands got sich an all-fired thrashin'. I tell you what, it takes a raal Down Easter to come the giraffe over Ingens."

The figurative language in which the stranger indulged, compounded of equal parts of bad Spanish and tortured English, was not likely to convey to his companions a very lucid idea of his meaning; but, enough was intelligible to indicate the fact that the stranger was prepared for cross-questioning.

"How happened it that you were with Marani's band, Señor Americano?"

"How kin a feller get into bad kump'ny? I was taken prisoner."

"And how did you escape, Señor?"

"Gin 'em leg bail."

The Mexican was completely at fault in the endeavor to interpret the last idiom of our Yankee, so he quickly changed the subject.

"How do you like our Captain, Don Ferrardo—eh, Señor?"

"He keeps nice cigars, no *mistake*."

"Are you going to enlist with us?"

"No, yaller-skin; see you derved fust. I'm a free-born citizen of the States, and don't fight under nary colors but the stars and stripes."

"What may they be, Señor?"

"Derved ignoramus, don't ye know that gel-lorious flag? I kinder guess that ef you'd been down to San Jacinter, whar Sam Houston gin the Mexicans partick'lar Jesse, you'd a-seen that ar' flag flyin', and Sainty Anny makin' tracks up an apple-tree. Well, you would?"

The Mexican smiled at the Yankee's vehement defense of his country's standard.

Pomfret proceeded to smoke his cigar in silence, returning the stare of his dark-featured companions with a glance of conscious national superiority.

Thus passed a quarter of an hour, the various figures remaining grouped picturesquely, their half-naked bodies bared to catch the least breeze that might stir for a moment the sultry atmosphere. To the mongrel soldiers, meanwhile, Pomfret was an object of peculiar interest, his protection by Don Ferrardo having generated a certain jealousy, which the Yankee's apparent shrewdness, and the evident contempt in which he seemed to hold them, did in no measure diminish.

Within the guard-house, at the entrance of the passage leading to the prison portion of the buildings, a single sentinel leaned carelessly against the wall, clasping with one hand his carabine, while in the other he held his heavy hat, which the heat had compelled him to remove from his reeking brow. His eyes were directed toward the open window, through which he could catch glimpses of waving woods and sheltered valleys, contrasting an idea of coolness and shade with the oppressive closeness of the fort. The grass-plot and trees before the guard-house, where his companions were quietly reposing, presented, likewise, a tantalizing picture.

But the sentinel, absorbed in his reflections, whether of envy or not, was unconscious that a door had been noiselessly opened in the interior passage, or that a tall figure was stealthily approaching the spot where he stood. In an instant a strong hand compressed his throat, and dashed him, stunned and powerless, against the floor.

Putnam Pomfret, mouthing his cigar, and the soldiers lying about the guard-house door, sprung simultaneously to their feet at the concussion produced by the sentinel's fall! but it was only to behold the stalwart form of Marani, the brigand, who, grasping the carabine wrenched from the hand of the guard, now brought it to bear on the group. Startled suddenly from a careless *siesta*, without arms, and crowded together at the guard-house door, the panic among the soldiers was complete. They stood silent for a moment; then breaking from the door, fled in all directions across the square.

Marani, with a laugh, sprung across the threshold, and gained the open space that separated the guard-house from the feeble barrier presented by the half-formed parapet.

Pomfret, rising with the rest, instantly comprehended the brigand's game. With a sudden bound, he leaped aside to a stack of arms, shouting, at the same time, to the Mexicans, to follow and recapture their prisoner. Marani beheld his peril, and saw the Mexicans pause, and then hurry to arms. As he gained the highest portion of the embankment, he saw that Pomfret's piece already covered his breast.

"Surrender, Ingen!" shouted the Yankee. "Sur-ren-der! or you're a gone critter! Shoot ye, sure as you live!"

Marani answered by almost instantly discharging his own piece. The ball struck Pomfret's gunstock and glanced aside.

"Je-ru-salem! what a critter!" exclaimed the Yankee, as the brigand disappeared beyond the embankment. "But come on, greasers! we'll capture him yet," shouted the gallant fellow, as he dashed after the fugitive.

"Come back! You are mad! He is the devil!" were the confused cries which arose from the soldiers; but Pomfret was already out of hearing, in full chase of the brigand, who had diverged from the open road into the intricacies of the wooded mountain, and kept on at full speed, though aware that he was followed by but one man.

Our Yankee, however, had lived and moved among the Green Mountains of his native State; and to dash vigorously through a tangled thicket, leap a barrier of fallen logs, or bound over a sunken chasm, was to him but a renewal of boyhood's sports.

Marani, on his part, skilled in all the hazards of his wild life, knew that his main chance of safety lay in keeping within the covert of the forest; and he hoped that his own more familiar acquaintance with both valley and mountain would, ere long, baffle any pursuer.

"Halt, ye consarned Ingen, or I'll shoot!" yelled Pomfret to the brigand, as the latter, after reaching the woody road, dashed boldly from its protection, and struck in a direct line for the rocky sides of the mountain, near which commenced a narrow defile, leading by many windings to the outlaw's retreat. In doing this, he necessarily exposed himself to the

aim of his pursuer, who was rapidly shortening the remaining distance between them.

"Halt, or I'll shoot!"

Marani stopped suddenly, and possessing himself of a heavy fragment of rock, hurled the missile at his foe! It was well aimed, but the nimble Pomfret avoided it, and with a "whoop!" brought his piece to bear upon the fugitive.

Marani crouched at the base of the rocks, and with a sinuous motion, dragged himself rapidly forward. Confounded by this maneuver, Pomfret paused in his aim, affording the brigand time to reach a shelving cliff, and disappear over its face. Pomfret darted forward, expecting to find the robber at bay, for to all appearance the projecting cliff was a barrier which cut off all approach to the mountain. But hardly had he passed the rock, when, instead of a brigand at bay, he beheld a long and tenantless pass, and the next moment fell to the ground under the weight of the robber, who, gaining a shelf of the cliff, leaped from it upon his too eager pursuer.

Our hero fell, his head striking the hard rock. It was but the work of a moment for Marani to wrest the still loaded carabine from his grasp, and then, disengaging himself, to level it at his late pursuer. Pomfret's fate seemed, to himself at least, to be sealed; but not so decided Marani. Accustomed to form his plans almost instantaneously, he quickly saw that the loaded musket in his hands might aid his escape more certainly than the death of his foe. He therefore contented himself with dealing a blow upon the Yankee's head, which laid him senseless upon the rocks. Then, shouldering his carabine, Marani sped on his course.

Thus Pomfret's headlong chase resulted only in mischance to himself. He lay upon the bare rocks, with blood streaming from a deep wound in his forehead, his consciousness completely gone. The sun glared fiercely upon him, and it was manifest that, if he should not perish from the loss of blood, he might finally experience a more horrible fate in his exposure on this unsheltered hill-side. But our friend's career was not yet finished, for seemingly, Providence ordained his preservation.

The echo of the retreating brigand's feet had but died in the distance, when through the wood, in the direction of the valley, approached the tall figure of Zumozin, returning from

his interview with Don Ferrardo Nunez. The serf advanced with his usual firm stride, and was about to enter the mountain pass, when Pomfret's bleeding form attracted his attention. He recognized at once the foreigner with whom he had conversed on the previous night, after discovering him in a similar precarious condition. Stooping over the insensible man, he endeavoured to arouse him to consciousness, but in vain. A death-like stupor possessed the stranger's senses, and his face was pallid as a corpse.

"The poor wretch is dying," cried the Peon. "He must be removed from this frightful heat."

Saying this, he raised Pomfret in his arms, with as much apparent ease as the latter would have lifted a rifle, and strode forward, though thus burdened, with a step as majestic as usual. He did not, however, follow the narrow pass for a great distance, but, diverging from the rocks, struck across the open plain toward another line of woodland skirting the base of a hill at some distance from the "Outlaw's Mount."

Pomfret gave no evidence, save by a faint flutter of his pulse, that he still possessed life ; nevertheless, Zumozin slackened not pace till he had threaded the woodland, and ascended an eminence at its other extremity. Arrived here, the serf paused a moment, and looked downward over the plain.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PEON ZUMOZIN.

A SCENE of varied interest was visible from the woody height. Afar off appeared a beautiful mansion, surrounded by trees, and presenting from this point the softened outlines of a charming picture. It was the hacienda of Juan Garcia, the alcalde, completely embowered in a thick grove, the rear of which was bordered by a graceful slope of lawn extending to the river's bank. The stream itself, at a distance of a quarter of a mile from the house, fell abruptly over a precipice, forming

a succession of broken cascades, and turning, at right angles from its previous course, to lose itself in a deep and narrow glen. Thus the hacienda was hemmed on two sides by the water, the sloping bank at its rear, and at its right a steep, shelving cliff, beneath which, at the depth of a hundred feet, flowed the river on its passage to the somber glen.

On the left of the mansion, the possessions of Juan Garcia extended for miles through the valley, diverging from the river, which approached the dwelling with a wide curve. Alternate marks of meadow, woodland and plantation, all bearing marks of careful supervision and labor, relieved the eye, and exhibited one source of their possessor's wealth, while, as if in contrast, a rift in the plain presented, as in a sort of valley, a collection of huts, which were the abodes of peons, and immediately around which the land was naked and sterile.

Thus a stranger, standing upon the table-land above the hacienda, might behold an illustration of the two extremes of Mexican existence. The mansion, embowered in carefully-trimmed and ornamental vegetation, with sloping lawns, was a perfect picture of rural luxury; while at a distance, the small gap of desert soil, crowded with miserable huts, and parched by the direct beams of a scorching sun, denoted the absence of nearly all enjoyment, and the paralyzing effects of abject, unrequited servitude.

There were at least a hundred huts dotting the barren plateau; Señor Juan Garcia was master of three hundred human beings, who dwelt in them.

Beyond and apart from the luxurious mansion were sterility and miasma.

The hot sunbeams darted fiercely, like a shower of fire, upon the very places where stood the peon dwellings, the huts of Garcia's bond-slaves.

But the hacienda was beautiful, and nature smiled upon it. There dwelt the master.

Downward upon the desert and the peon huts—which were indeed his home—the serf, Zumozin, gazed. Then slowly, with the form of the wounded Yankee in his arms, he descended to the barren plateau.

It was now some hours after midday, and the heat was at its greatest point. No sign of life appeared around the qualid huts which Zumozin approached. The tenants, save alone the bedridden and infants, were now toiling in their master's fields, or in a factory which he had established upon the river some three miles from the hacienda. To this factory, a novel experiment at that time, the greater portion of the debtors who inhabited this village repaired at early dawn, there to toil till sunset, when receiving their rations of food, they were permitted to return home to their miserable rest.

Zumozin was not subjected to this factory labor, but, with about two score others, Indians like himself, was charged with the keeping of large droves of cattle which Garcia pastured in the mountains, and which, reared for the annual markets, were a source of much profit to their owner's coffers.

The serf, until he reached the age of fifteen, had been numbered among the house dependents of the alcalde, and at that age, from some whim of his master, or because, as many thought, of a fierce quarrel which arose between Garcia and the boy, had been transferred at once from the hacienda to the mountains, and placed in the degrading position of a herd-boy, among the half-wild Indian peons. Previously to this, the youth had been thought a favorite of his master, and had enjoyed many privileges unknown to others of his class. In fact, during his early boyhood he had been allowed to share in the lessons which the alcalde's niece, Isabel, received from her tutor, a priest, who resided in the house of Garcia, and who, discovering the boy's aptitude for study, took pleasure in cultivating his youthful mind. From him, Zumozin had received the first rudiments of an education, which, after his banishment to the mountains, he had learned to cultivate with every means in his power.

To the priest, Herrata, indeed, the Peon was indebted for that knowledge of foreign tongues which had so astonished the soldier Nunez. And such lore as this was not the extent of information which the boy had gathered from his clerical friend.

Padre Herrata was a patriot, in the highest sense of the word. Descended, on his mother's side, from the pure-blooded

natives of the upper regions of Mexico, the priest inherited much of that defiant spirit which marks the Mexican who is untainted by the blood and influence of his European oppressors—a spirit impatient of the unnatural restrictions which *caste* winds around the people. He had been born under Spanish despotism, and lived to behold the foreign tyrants driven from his country ; but, alas ! had also lived to witness the distracted counsels of even her liberators, and to mark clique after clique of Republican despots possess the rule of his unhappy land, while her people, unfreed by their conflicts, unblessed by their sufferings, were still, as ever, the prey of oppressors—ruthless, though petty tyrants, who, by monopoly, extortion and rapacity, amassed the wealth which properly belonged to those whose labor and struggles had opened the avenues to industry and commerce.

From this patriotic priest, as he recapitulated his country's history, and bewailed her fate, Anselmo Zumozin had early imbibed a hatred of oppression in all its forms, and had, moreover, felt awakened within him thoughts and impulses of which even the good padre was quite unaware. Their precise character or tendency, Zumozin himself could not explain ; but, their effect seemed to bring about a crisis, which, as we have seen, at the age of fifteen years banished the boy from his master's dwelling to the labors of the mountain, and the companionship of half-civilized men. This crisis was, as was shrewdly divined among the peons, a quarrel with the *alcalde*, in which the latent spirit of the lad had flashed up so suddenly as to startle Garcia from his usual equanimity, and induce him to cut off his servant at once and forever from all advantages of civilized intercourse ; while Padre Herrata, for the part he had taken in developing the boy's spirit, was likewise favored with a polite intimation that his services were no longer needed at the hacienda. Thus it was, that, in his fifteenth year, Zumozin had become a herd-boy, and the patriotic priest, his teacher, had lost the favor of the *alcalde*. What afterward had befallen the Padre Herrata, Anselmo could never learn, but he still cherished the liveliest gratitude for the good man's early care and instruction.

But to return to the rude huts of the village, one of which the serf had just entered. It was of no larger proportions

and not a whit more comfortable than the hovels which surrounded it, but it possessed the advantage of being unshared by any other debtor. In one corner, upon the brown earth, lay a few skins of oxen, which served for Anselmo's couch. A rude table and stool, with a few cooking utensils and dishes, constituted the remainder of the furniture of the dwelling.

Into this hut Zumozin bore the Yankee. Placing him gently upon the couch, he proceeded to examine his injuries. The blow that Marani dealt was severe, but its direct force had evidently been parried by the haste with which it was dealt.

Zumozin washed the wound and bathed the other bruises. In a few moments he enjoyed the satisfaction of beholding his patient's return to consciousness. Carefully bandaging his forehead, and disposing him comfortably upon the rude bed, Zumozin watched beside him until a soothing slumber began to steal over the sufferer's senses. Then noiselessly leaving the hut, he took his course across the barren stretch toward the river's bank and the deep glen, beyond which was situated the hacienda of Juan Garcia, whither we will precede him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNCLE AND NIECE.

In an elegant apartment of the alcalde's mansion, adorned with all that a cultivated taste might covet, sat, or rather reclined, upon a silken couch, a female clad in a light blue robe, which flowed in graceful folds around her person. Through an open window a heavy atmosphere of aromatic odors floated into the room. The window looked out upon a prospect of nature's loveliness at her most gladsome season. Amid the tall, straight trees, might be caught glimpses of quiet, shaded hillocks, clustering thickets of luxuriant flowers, and sheets of shining water falling over abrupt rocks, or gliding serenely between grassy banks. The murmur of distant cascades came musically from the woods and from the

low glen; and the fragrance of the flowers, cooled by a gentle breeze, wooed the lady seemingly into pleasant dreams, for she became still and thoughtful as if in a heart-revery.

Suddenly a man glided from the quiet glen, and reaching the corner of the hacienda, stood, concealed by the clustering vines, gazing through the leaves upon the unconscious dreamer. It was Zumozin, the serf.

With arms crossed upon a breast swelling as if agitated by violent thought, the serf looked long upon the lady. At last, with a sigh, he shrunk back, and, drawing a silken packet from the folds of his coarse garment, flung it through the open casement.

The lady, startled from her revery, beheld the clustering foliage shaken as by the wind. She rose from the couch, and gazed anxiously out upon the balcony. Zumozin was closely screened by the foliage, and watched the lady's motions. As Isabel looked out, Juan Garcia appeared at the door of her room.

The alcalde stood motionless a moment, his restless glance wandering from his niece's form to every object in the room. Suddenly it fell upon the packet which had fallen upon the couch. Zumozin beheld his master steal noiselessly across the floor, and possessing himself of the packet, retire as quietly to the door, his departure, like his entrance, unheard by the maiden, who, disappointed in her scrutiny, now turned from the casement, and resumed her seat.

A frown overspread Garcia's usually smiling face, as, breaking the string which confined the purloined missive, he perused its contents:

"SEÑORA ISABEL:—Let me behold thee but for one moment at early twilight, in the wood behind the hacienda. I have much to say to thee. FERRARDO."

"Ha!" was Garcia's long-drawn exclamation, muttered between his clenched teeth, as he read these few words.

Crumbling the silk in his hand, he paused for a moment to reflect.

"It must be broken," at last he murmured, "else my schemes fall to the dust. My niece shall no longer trifle. I must be speedy in that which I have to do."

Smoothing his ruffled countenance into his habitual calm,

Garcia thrust the packet into his pocket, and then, with measured steps, returned to Isabel's presence.

"I returned from my morning ride sooner than I expected, and have immediately sought my sweet niece, especially as I have something to communicate which will doubtless interest her."

The lady instinctively resumed an unconscious haughtiness of demeanor, but made no reply. Garcia proceeded :

"We leave for the capital to-morrow morning."

"Indeed ! It is somewhat sudden, Señor."

"Are you not weary of this seclusion, Isabel ?"

"I can not confess so much. Quiet is not unpleasant."

Garcia's lips curled, and he seemed inclined to hazard a remark, which, on second thought, he repressed.

"It will be a gay season in Mexico, if rumour speaks truly. I anticipate great changes in the reign of fashion, if not in other reigns."

"Truly, Señor, you are freighted with gossip. What, I pray you, may result from the change of which you speak ?"

"What say you, fair niece of mine, to a court and royalty ? Not like the mock empire of my poor friend Iturbide, but a substantial—"

"And pray, Señor, what have I to do with all this ?" inquired the maiden, with a look of well-feigned surprise.

Garcia bit his lips, and remained silent.

"Probably another of your important secrets, Señor," remarked the lady, in a careless tone.

Then, assuming an air of vexation, she continued :

"I shall be rejoiced when this reign of mystery, under which I live, can give place to something else, be it what it will."

"Your wish may be gratified sooner than you expect, my lovely niece," remarked the alcalde, dryly.

Isabel betrayed impatience.

"Well, I shall be ready to accompany you to-morrow, Señor," she said, pointedly, turning her face away from the alcalde.

"Many thanks, sweet niece," returned Garcia, raising the maiden's hand to his lips, without appearing to notice her marked indifference to his presence. "At early dawn, if it please you, we will away."

The alcalde then, with a parting obeisance, retired from the saloon, and Isabel, leaning her forehead upon her white hand, became speedily immersed in thought.

When Garcia had crossed the threshold of the apartment, he half turned, and raised his finger threateningly at the unobservant Isabel.

"Proud girl," he muttered, "I will mold your destiny to my purposes. To-morrow you shall be far out of the reach of this adventurer, Ferrardo Nunez."

The serf had witnessed and heard all. He now glided from his concealment, and noiselessly threading the garden, penetrated to the patch of woodland immediately in the rear of the mansion. This woodland was not wild and irregular like that which bordered the mountain, but exhibited the works of the gardener's skill. The undergrowth had been removed, and the twilight shadows fell over smooth grass thinned to velvet softness by constant care, while the lower branches of the trees were trimmed in symmetric proportion. Even the thick, spinous leaves of the aloe, which upon the mountain grew in tangled and hedgy closeness, were here separated and trained into distinct masses, from which the pyramidal clusters of flowers issued in luxuriant beauty. Around the trunks of many of the trees crept the night-flowering cactus, whose magnificent blossoms were just opening to receive the brilliant kisses of the moon, its mistress. And from the gardens which, extending from one extremity of this wood, half-encircled the mansion, was wafted the aroma of a thousand rare plants exhaling with the dews of eve.

It was a paradise, this country-seat of the alcalde Garcia. Such a paradise as wealth procures for the most unworthy of the human family—such a paradise as is denied, upon this earth, to the best and noblest of God's creatures.

Thus reflected Zumozin, as he paused, and beheld another figure advance, whom he recognized as Don Ferrardo Nunez.

"Ah! Zumozin, did you convey to her my letter?"

"It is to inform you of the result of my attempt to do so that I am here," returned the serf.

Then, in a few words, he related the particulars of the interview which he had witnessed between Garcia and his niece.

"But will not Isabel see me? Will she depart without one word?"

"Behold!" said the serf, pointing, as he spoke, to a light form which at this moment appeared at the edge of the wood. "Has not this been your trysting-place, Don Ferrardo? Doubt not she comes, though expecting not your presence, Ferrardo! brother! farewell!"

With these words, the serf grasped his friend's hand, pressed it to his heart, and then, returning to the Padre Herrata and the Yankee, he led them from the wood.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRIEST AND A DESTINY.

PUTNAM POMFRET lay upon the Peon's rude bed, and beside him sat Anselmo himself. The Yankee, much renovated by slumber, now exhibited some of his natural animation, replying to the serf's questions by a detail of the incidents which had led to his last escapade.

"And the next time I hunt a yaller-skin through these 'ere woods, may I be busted!" was the remark with which Pomfret concluded his recital.

"It was a rash attempt," said the Peon. "Marani is too well acquainted with the forest; and had you fallen into the power of his band again, your escape would not have been easy."

"Spect not," returned Pomfret. "The critters don't owe me any good-will, that's a fact. I guess I'll take your advice, stranger, and make tracks out o' these 'ere diggings fast as possible. I'd kinder like to see that 'ere Capt'ing Nunez, however. He's a good feller, I reckon."

"You had better pursue your route to the capital, without returning to the station," replied the Peon. "The soldiers look with no favor upon you. I heard more than one threat against you in yonder guard-room."

"You did?" cried the Yankee. "How in time could *you* hear what was goin' on up yonder?"

"I was there," quietly replied the serf—"those drowsy soldiers little know when the slave Zumozin listens to their reckless prattle. 'Tis not the first time I have scaled your rocks behind the barracks."

"And are you a slave, stranger?"

"Such am I held in law," answered the Peon, bitterly.

"Wall, now, you're a nat'ral fool to be so. I should like to see 'em makin' a slave o' Put Pomfret, unless they chained up his legs with iron balls. Jerusalem! why don't ye make tracks? I'll stan' by ye, and see ye safe through. I will."

"Thanks!" said Zumozin, with a faint smile as he noticed the Yankee's enthusiasm. "The time may come when Zumozin shall be free."

"The time *will* come," said a voice at the door of the cot, and turning suddenly, the Peon beheld the figure of a man past the middle age, with features of much nobleness, though the traces of care and suffering were legible in their many lines. He wore a coat of dark-brown cloth, of a coarse texture, reaching below his knees, and bound by a cord about the waist. His head was covered by a round felt hat, which, thrown back from his forehead, revealed his countenance, whereon the beams of the declining sun were falling mildly.

Zumozin cast one glance, and then, with a burst of joy that seemed the welling up of long-pent feelings, sprung from the Yankee's side, and threw himself into the extended arms of the stranger.

"Padre Herrata!"

"Anselmo, my boy!"

Long and fervid was that embrace on the part of the Peon and his long-lost teacher. It seemed like the meeting of father and son, so warm was their mutual clasp, so endearing the expression which seemed to break spontaneously from their lips.

When, at length, after gazing fondly in the face of the young man, as if to recall every feature of his boyhood, the priest mastered in some degree his emotion, and contented himself with retaining the serf's hand within his own, Zumozin spoke:

"My more than father, do I again behold thee? I have prayed for this blessed hour."

"Anselmo, the good God reunites us, no more to part till I have fulfilled a great trust committed to me. My boy, you must leave this place, and go with me."

"Whither, my father?"

"To Mexico. But who is yonder man?" inquired the padre in a lower tone, noticing for the first time that they were not alone.

"A stranger, father; but, fear him not, for he is not of the race of our oppressors; he will not betray our confidence."

"No, by thunder, that I won't," cried the Yankee. "Put Pomfret never plays false to a friend, Ingen or not. And you're a true friend, for you've saved this critter's life more'n once a'ready."

Zumozin acknowledged the Yankee's expression of gratitude by an inclination of the head, and then, turning to the priest, remarked:

"We need fear nothing, Padre Herrata."

"Well, my son, I would have you set out at once with me from this place for the capital. On our way I will reveal much that concerns you. My boy, there is a God in heaven, who hears the cry of the oppressed."

"As you have often assured me, father," returned Zumozin. "I know not now for what purpose you would conduct me from this place. But, Padre Herrata! my earliest friend! my teacher, to whom I owe all that I am, I know that to obey your command is to follow the will of God."

"Enough, my boy. May heaven direct us both," said the priest solemnly. "And now, Anselmo, in this, the hour of our reunion, it is meet that we give praise unto our Father in heaven."

Kneeling on the floor of the hut, in which attitude Zumozin likewise sunk, the Padre Herrata lifted his hands, and poured forth an earnest prayer. The wounded Yankee looked on in silent sympathy, while the deep tones of the priest's voice arose upon the air, and the golden sunbeams glanced in a halo around his placid brow. Juan Garcia had no power to check that fervent prayer in his serf's hut.

CHAPTER XX.

ZUMUZIN THE KING.

THE setting sun, disappearing behind the western barriers of the valley, cast a parting gleam upon that desert plateau, whereon were scattered the forlorn huts of the peons. The little hamlet was not quiet, as at midday, for its population, released from their daily toils, had returned to their dwellings, and were occupied in preparing their evening meals, from the scanty supplies allowed them by their overseers.

There was every variety of character to be discovered among these unfortunates; for poverty embraces in its sad list all shades of experience, and all descriptions of nature.

Here were collected men and woman of a dozen different races. The degraded representative of European lineage side by side with the vagabond Mestizo and the half-savage Indian. The latter class, however, predominated in numbers, and also in character, exhibiting less of the stolid indifference or despairing submission which marked the others, and giving token of unbroken spirit, even in their dependent situation.

Many of these latter were, at the present time, engaged in apparently careless sport; some casting stones at a rude target erected in some quarter of the village; others dancing a fandango, and others, again, chanting a not unmusical chorus, keeping measured time by beating sticks against the walls of their huts.

Altogether, the peon village presented an appearance of mirth, which might have impressed an unreflecting stranger with an idea that its inhabitants were very contented with their lot.

Perhaps it is a wise provision of divine care, that the human heart, even in its severest trials, has yet the faculty of drawing some fleeting good from the midst of its hard endurance. The wretched captive in his dungeon may be cheated out of sad reflections by the distant whistle of a bird, the gambols of a tame mouse or spider, or, perchance, the transitory presence of a sunbeam gleaming through his prison

bars. So, likewise, the captive of cruel fate, the slave of circumstance and victim of oppression, whether he be helot, or peon, or human chattel, may and will find evanescent enjoyments even in the extremes of his misfortunes.

Zumozin stood at the door of his hut, his hand clasped in that of his restored friend, Padre Herrata. Both looked upon the scene with emotion. Both felt the mockery of the apparent enjoyment which they witnessed.

At a little distance from them stood the Yankee, leaning against a corner of the hut. His head was still bandaged, but, save an unusual paleness of his countenance, he appeared to suffer little from the effects of his severe experience during the last twenty-four hours. Indeed, Put Pomfret's constitution was of the toughest nature, and his wiry frame capable of enduring and resisting as much hardship as that of any brigand. He had been accustomed to exposure and fatigue, and somewhat familiar with hard blows from boyhood, and his checkered life, thus far, as woodsman, farmer, hunter, and sailor, had taught him to regard with equanimity such incidents of travel as resulted in his present familiarity with different phases of Mexican life. Consequently, Pomfret, on being made acquainted with the intention of Zumozin to depart that night with the Padre Herrata for the capital, had at once mustered resolution and strength, and declared his intention of accompanying them.

The sun had now totally vanished from the valley, and the evening was closing in. Zumozin called to a young man who stood near him, and who, by his complexion, was likewise of the Indian race :

"Tebayo, come hither."

The youth was at his side in a moment, and awaiting with evident deference the serf's further speech.

"Tebayo, summon together our brothers, and repair to the Sacred House as soon as the moon is risen. I will await you."

The young Indian made an inclination of the body, lifting his hand to his forehead, and answered in a strange tongue. Then, turning quickly, he mingled with his companions.

Zumozin exchanged a meaning smile with the padre, and beckoning to Pomfret to follow, strode rapidly away from the huts. The priest kept by his side.

The Yankee, though able to walk, was still extremely weak, and suffering acute pain from the bruises which he had received. Nevertheless, he contrived to keep up with the serf and his friend, though unable to take part in or comprehend their conversation, which was carried on in the Indian dialect, which is intelligible to very few even of the native Mexicans.

The serf strode on with his companions, for some moments after they had left the wood, without addressing a word to either.

At length the Yankee, unaccustomed to preserve a long silence, remarked, in his own vernacular :

"Wall, I rayther think this 'ere travelin' scrape'll about gin me a decent plenty o' furrin adventoor. In futur', I guess I'll stick to city trade, and not go roamin' 'round over the hull o' creation."

"We know not, my son, what our future may bring forth," remarked the padre, in pure English. "We are but instruments in the hands of our Heavenly Father."

"Jerusalem, mister, do you speak English?" cried the Yankee, stopping short, and staring at the priest with an odd mixture of astonishment and delight. "Wall, now, I reckon I've got on a soft place, seein's how the hull of us can talk like Christians. Give me your hand, ole feller; I'm proud o' your acquaintance, now I tell ye, 'cause I b'lieve you're a good man."

Saying this, the North American took the padre's hand, and would probably have proceeded to some livelier expression of satisfaction by a vigorous shaking of that member, had not a severe pain which shot through his body reminded him of the recent maltreatment he had undergone.

"It's no go," cried poor Pomfret. "I hain't got a morsel of strength left. I do believe I ain't enterprisin' enough to pick a raisin off its stem, by golly!"

And the Yankee, letting his hand drop by his side, made a weak attempt to laugh at his own weakness.

"Come, we have a league to walk," said Zumozin, speaking now for the first time since they had left Garcia's wood. "Let us quicken our pace."

Saying this, the serf advanced more rapidly in a path

diverging to the open country, and, in a few moments, the party arrived in view of an object which at once arrested our Yankee's attention.

The moon had arisen, and her clear radiance fell from the broad heavens, covering trees and valleys as with a mantle of silver. It fell over the mountainous walls that shut in the valley, and shot up from the plains. It showed afar the mountain Popocatepetl casting forth its perpetual column of smoky flame, and further still, with the crown of eternal snow, rising grandly toward the skies, his great brother Iztaccihuatl.

And immediately before him Pomfret beheld an immense building, whose vast shadow stretched far over the plain. The form of this structure was pyramidal, its apex nearly two hundred feet high, its base covering four times that extent of ground. It towered aloft, a mighty monument of the past, for it was a temple of the ancient Mexic race; it was the great house of the Sun, where, centuries before, the priests of Tlascala held their awful rites, while a hundred thousand warriors marched around, chanting the war-songs of their native land.

The moonbeams slanted over this mighty pyramid, reflected back dazzlingly on the beholder's gaze. Pomfret, impressed with awe at the grandeur of the pile, remained silent, as his companions passed along its base to the further extremity. Here another structure, of similar form, and nearly as magnificent in its proportions, was visible at some distance, and around the two the Yankee could behold a circle of smaller pyramids, rising like tombs from the face of the plain. At the same moment he became aware of a multitude of human figures, standing half-shrouded in the shadows of the pyramids, and motionless as statues carved in stone.

But Zumozin, advancing before his companions, cried, in a loud voice :

"Who are these who stood between the Houses of the Sun and Moon?"

Then a response went up from the multitude of dusky figures, as if a thousand men spoke in one clear whisper :

"We are of the blood of Tlascala. We are the children of Zumozin, our king."

Hardly had these words fallen upon the ears of the astonished Yankee, and the no less surprised Padre Herrata, than a simultaneous movement was visible among the assemblage, and advancing, as if by a preconcerted signal, the multitude closed around the serf and his companions. Then appeared Anselmo Zumozin in his natural character. His majestic figure was drawn to its full stature, his head thrown proudly back, until the light shone upon his brow. His eyes were lustrous as with great thought.

"Children of Tlascala," said he solemnly, "may we not tonight to recall the memory of our ancestors, to exchange our vows of friendship with one another, to swear fidelity to the ancient laws of our country."

A low murmur ran through the ranks of men, and with one accord they sunk upon their knees. Zumozin remained standing, and his two companions could now examine the multitude who surrounded them.

They were evidently of the pure Indian race, and many of them were distinguished-looking both in form and features. The greater part were humbly clad, some in coarse cotton cloth, others in fabrics manufactured of the bark and fibers of the aloe or agave tree, before noticed as growing upon the mountain, and which is a plant that furnishes to the native tribes a large portion of their clothing, and articles of domestic use, as well as producing the substance out of which is expressed the national beverage of *pulque*, or, as the aborigines called it, *oetli*. The dusky figures of many were relieved by shining ornaments of copper, and some carried in their hands spears and axes such as had been used among the ancient race, and which were probably heir-looms in particular families.

"Father," said Zumozin, speaking in a low and impressive tone to the priest beside him, "you behold the fruit of your early counsels to the boy Anselmo. These whom you look upon are of the ancient races of Tlascala and Cholulu, who fought first and bravest against the invader. Father, their blood flows in your veins, as in mine. But in mine runs the ancient tide of Tlascala's princes, and therefore, though I am crownless, and a serf, the children of Tlascala listen to my words."

"And you have awakened their spirit, my son?" asked the priest.

"I have spoken to them, my father, as you were wont to speak to the wandering boy in yonder hacienda. I have recalled to them the glories and the sufferings of our ancestors. I have revealed to them the prophetic traditions which yet promise peace and happiness to Aztlan."

"Ay, I remember," said the padre, solemnly. "The tradition that out of her ancient race should arise a deliverer for the oppressed. May God speed his coming."

"He will!" cried Zumozin.

Then, turning towards the Indians, who had arisen from their knees, he waved his hand thrice, speaking to them in the language of their Aztec fathers. They responded in the same tongue; and then, forming in a line, began to defile with slow steps before the central group, each one, as he passed Zumozin, extending his right hand toward the House of the Sun, and repeating what appeared to be a customary formula:

"I swear to be true to Aztlan!"

When the last erect figure had passed the Peon Prince, the long line sunk to the knees, bowing between the two pyramids of ancient Tlascala, and then Zumozin the Sold, advancing before his countrymen, lifted his arms to heaven, and prayed aloud in the Indian tongue.

Thus, beneath the same clear moon that had, in other days, looked down upon the free children of that beautiful land, the thousand slaves, their descendants, assembled to commemorate their old traditions. They had stolen forth from the city and hamlet, from mountain and vale, to commune before the sacred altar of their ancestors. And as the pale-faced stranger from a land of freedom listened to the strange accents of an Indian prayer, rising upon the still air, to the Father of nations, he felt that these serfs still hoped for liberty and longed for a day of battle against their oppressors.

Putnam Pomfret, the Vermonter, whose fathers had fought at Bennington and Ticonderoga, grasped the hand of the priest who stood beside him, and murmured his deep "Amen," to the prayer of a serf, for freedom.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO ACTS OF A DRAMA.

ANSELMO ZUMOSIN and his friend, Padre Herrata, in company with Putnam Pomfret, departed from the mystic gathering which they had attended, retracing their steps across the plain. On all sides, divergent from the pyramids, the children of Aztlan were dispersing to their respective habitations. At the same hour three horsemen could be seen, advancing from different points toward the ancient ruins.

Zumozin's keen glance was the first to descry the nocturnal cavaliers; and, as they drew near, illumined by the moonbeams, it was apparent that the serf recognized their persons; for, with a sudden gesture he stayed his companions.

"Yonder," whispered he, "ride those who come far that they may converse without fear of eavesdroppers. Consequently, there is reason that I should overhear what they talk about. Remain here, my friends, in the shadow of these ancient shrines."

Saying this, the serf pointed to several broken slabs of stone, relics of monuments with which the plain had once been covered; and then, while the priest and Pomfret cast themselves prone upon the sand, behind them, he proceeded to make a detour, in order to reach a point whence he could observe the approaching horsemen, who were now between the Houses of the Sun and Moon. Preserving a stooping gait, which confounded his dark garments with the thick verdure, it was not long ere the Peon gained a knoll, overgrown with rank grass, and strewed with the debris of some ruined shaft that had long ago crumbled. Scarcely had he ensconced himself here, when, almost simultaneously, the three cavaliers drew near at the base of the hillock, and the two foremost exchanged salutations:

"Don Mariano!"

"Juan Garcia!"

Then followed a few rapid words between the alcalde and the other, which Zumozin could not distinctly hear, followed

by the remark, in a louder key : " I will question him myself ! Retire you, Garcia, for a moment."

The alcalde reined his horse, and galloped round the hill-top, trampling the grass which concealed his listening self. Then he who had been addressed as Don Mariano turned to the third horseman, who was sitting immovable in his saddle, and said abruptly :

" You are Giacomo Marani !—late a prisoner at La Vega's valley post, wherefrom you were released by my friend, Juan Garcia."

" You are mistaken, Señor ! I released myself !"

" How ! has Garcia deceived me ?"

" No, Señor ! Juan Garcia came to my prison, and remarked : ' Marani, if you could make your escape, by knocking down a sentinel, and if you should thereafter desire to serve the State, there will, no doubt, be a free pardon made out for you.'"

" Ah ! there spoke my non-committal Garcia ! And you, sir—"

" I took the alcalde's counsel, agreed to every thing, and after Garcia left the barracks, I followed him as soon as I could."

" And he spoke to you of pardon and reward ?"

" On condition of what I am to do in the matter of an expected *conducta* of treasure—"

" Do you know to what important events this enterprise may lead ! Are you aware that great interests are involved ?"

" I apprehend that my success in securing the treasure may involve a revolution. But, Señor, revolutions are so common now a-days—"

" You are the coadjutor I want," interrupted Don Mariano. " Serve me well, Giacomo Marani, and you will not be the loser. The action I want must be bold and prompt—foot in stirrup and sword in hand. I think I would rather trust you than Garcia."

" I will serve you faithfully, General. But I must have your safeguard."

" You shall have a commission as Captain in my guards."

" I am grateful, General ; before three days pass, this *conducta* shall be attacked, and the treasure shall be yours. Must I communicate with Juan Garcia ?"

"No! report to me at Puebla; Garcia will inform you in what manner, in three days."

"In three days, General."

"That is well! Now, we may join our alcalde." Saying this, Don Mariano and the brigand rode to meet Juan Garcia, who was awaiting them. Presently, all three galloped away over the plain; whereupon Anselmo Zumozin rose from his covert, and crept toward his friends.

"Juan Garcia," murmured the Peon, "you have one slave too many."

Giacomo Marani, a man of quick resolve and action, soon parted from his fellow-horsemen, and took his way alone toward the neighboring town of Puebla. He had already decided on the plan of his contemplated expedition against the *conducta*.

This *conducta* or caravan, it was well known, was now approaching from the coast, conveying an immense sum in specie and bullion belonging to the Government, together with merchandise of the costliest kind. It was understood to be provided with ample means of defense and a powerful escort. Nevertheless, Marani was aware that, since his late disastrous encounter at Murillo's farm-house, the rumor had been extensively circulated to the effect that the band of the "Outlaw's Mount" was completely panic-stricken and dispersed; and this, together with the news of himself being made prisoner, was calculated, as the shrewd brigand thought, to render the advancing caravan less apprehensive of attack. On this account, Marani hoped to arrange his measures with certain anticipations of complete triumph.

So, after his parting with Don Mariano, the robber Captain pursued his way in deep reflection, until he had left the open plain behind, and reached the environs of Puebla, where he paused at a point whence diverged two lonely roads, and entered a small posada or roadside inn. Here a man, who had been evidently awaiting his arrival, arose and saluted him. A mule, meanwhile, stood tethered at the door.

"Ah, comrade, you are prompt as usual," said Marani, in reply to the greeting. "What news from the Mount?"

"As you left it," answered the man. "And we are all ready for our new enterprise, whatever it may be. There is

not one of us, Captain, but is ready to die rather than suffer ourselves to be so shamefully beaten as we were at Murillo's farm-house."

"Return, then, without delay, to our comrades. Say to them that Marani will be with them, ere to-morrow's sun declines, to lead them where they may retrieve our late misfortune. Let them be ready!"

"And the prisoner—the youth who is now with us. Gomez bade me ask what is to be done with him?"

Marani remained for a few moments in thought, ere he answered:

"The artist—I had forgotten him. Say to Gomez he may let the young man depart!" Then, turning aside, Marani muttered: "Yes, yes—what should I fear from this poor, half-crazed youth? Let him go. He is safe, unless he cross my path hereafter. Now, away, and by to-morrow's sunset, muster all at the valley pass. Let each man be well armed, and ready for hot work. The word is 'Paredes!' Away!"

"Paredes," repeated the messenger. Then, mounting the mule, set out toward the "Outlaw's Mount," while Marani, again mounting his horse, rode forward into Puebla.

"Ah!" said the brigand to himself, when his horse's hoofs clattered soon after on the pavement of Puebla's streets, "did these good people know that Marani was so near them, they would scarcely sleep sound to-night."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONDUCTA.

THE night on which the robbers threatened the caravan was one of loneliness and quiet; but little was its beauty and peace shared by those rude men who at the twilight hour descended from the "Outlaw's Mount," and scattered themselves at intervals along the valley road, concealed by the thick growth of trees that covered it. The *conducta*, with its treasures, was now momentarily expected, and though the

traders were known to be well armed, fortified by government protections, and guarded by a military force, the followers of Marani looked to an easy surprise and capture of their prey.

The opportunity of accompanying a convoy of government treasure, and thus uniting their private strength with that of the military, is regarded almost as an insurance by the interior traders, while, in addition, single travelers often time their movements with the progress of one of these caravans, in order to swell its numbers, and thus present a numerical front guaranteeing greater security to all. It is seldom, therefore, that these large companies are molested by brigands, save, perhaps, in periods of civil war, or when the marauders have managed to concert with traitors among the government escort. As a general thing, a traveler might journey with a caravan through the entire country, and (for all his personal experience could prove to the contrary,) set down every previous tale concerning banditti as mere moonshine.

The present, however, threatened to be a bold exception to the general rule of impunity; for there was a desperate as well as assured look about the brigands who now lined the roadside, that boded no good to the approaching caravan.

The position chosen by the outlaws was one which, of itself, gave them no small advantage.

At the distance of about a quarter of a mile from the place where Marani had formed his ambuscade, was a rocky hill, totally destitute of vegetation, from the summit of which the road over which the *conducta* must pass descended quite precipitously into a deep and narrow gully, densely bordered with heavy trees. Beyond this gully was another rise, not, perhaps, so steep as the rocky hill just mentioned, but yet sufficiently difficult of ascent, and curving very suddenly into a shelving pass which conducted through the heart of the mountains. This pass diverged at a sort of fork, the other arm of which led downward through Murillo's valley, and thence up to the military post commanded by La Vega; and it was quite as possible that a frightened mule train would turn aside into the mountain gorge as that it should keep on to the more secure valley road. At this point, the brigands were so posted as to be enabled to force their prey into the position which would place it most at their mercy.

The caravan, with all its appurtenances, was at this moment scarcely a league distant from the ambuscade; and as it leisurely wound its way, the pleasant sound of tinkling mule-bells floated to the listening robbers upon the quiet evening air.

And very little seemed the varied throng that followed and preceded the government treasure to reck of the presence of such dangerous neighbors as the brigands now sentineled along their route. In this throng might be observed, as our Vermont friend would probably express it, "a smart sprinklin'" of all sorts of people. Here was a muleteer, in slouched hat and ragged doublet, swinging a long thong, and pouring out volleys of oaths, snatches of songs, and muttered grumblings, all, as it were, in the same breath. Opposite him lazily marched a government soldier, tilting his carabine horizontally upon his shoulder, while he conversed with a comrade upon the possibility of some new *pronunciamento* offering a prospect of speedy war and spoils. Here was a priest, ambling leisurely upon a fat mule, and there a stalwart trader, leading his horse by the bridle, and keeping a stealthy eye upon every object within gun-shot. And the motley costumes, the wild figures of muleteers, the confused noises of songs, bells, and curses, combined to produce a scene worthy of Salvator's pencil.

All due precautions had been taken, and the company was under the direction of an experienced mountain guide, who, clad in a garb half muleteer, half soldier, rode a sure-footed mustang, at the head of the troop, keeping up a rapid conversation with one of the traders, whose appearance and position denoted him to be the leader of the mercantile portion of the caravan.

The guide was a sharp-looking, bead-eyed, compactly-built man, of about fifty years of age, with a seamed face, a restless head that he appeared able to turn completely round without wringing his neck, and legs which clung as closely to the sides of his mustang as did the old man of the sea to the shroulers of *Sinbad*. He gesticulated with one hand, and with the other grasped his horse's shaggy mane.

The guide's companion was a fine-looking personage, of perhaps the same age, clad in a close-fitting doublet and short mantle, with a carabine slung over his shoulder, and arms of

various kinds bristling about his person. His countenance was a noble one, and of that singular cast uniting the clear northern blue eye with the black hair and eyebrows of southern climes. A shade of settled thought and the lines of severe experience gave solemnity to a countenance which more naturally had borne a frank and joyous expression. This individual was the Captain of the traders, under whose direction were the mercantile interests and private treasures of the company.

A short distance behind these two, half-way between them and the leading military detachment, rode two other persons, likewise engaged in conversation. One was a young man apparently scarce beyond majority, who wore the gaudy uniform of a Captain of lancers, and who was, in fact, the commanding officer of the government soldiers, and the one to whom was intrusted the safe conduct of the specie. Like most of the class, he was gay, brave, and careless, with a haughty lip, a bright black eye, and graceful person.

His companion, as regarded personal appearance, was decidedly the opposite. Fancy a combination of three manifestations of Mexican life, as developed in soldier, brave, and lepero. Imagine a pair of red-stockinged legs, slung over a stunted mustang, and supporting a burly body, on which was apparently tumbled a collection of nondescript garments, ragged and parti-colored, the whole covered with a faded yellow blanket, confined to the waist by a black leather belt. Place on the shoulders, above this blanket, a round hat and shock of tangled black hair, a face almost concealed by its bushy beard, and a mouth crooked diagonally from the right temple to the left ear, and you have before you the grotesque figure which now rode side by side with the young lancer. Add to the attractions enumerated above, a hoarse voice and cracked laugh, and the likeness will be more distinct.

The last sunbeam had long since quivered on the wood-tops and mountain side, and the mellow atmosphere of transient southern twilight was now deepening, toward the valley, into a sober brown. Still the long train wound slowly forward, the mule-bells tinkled, and alternate song and laughter sounded from the motley travelers.

"There is not, then, much danger to be apprehended even

here, my friend, if you know so well the road. It is long since I myself traveled it, but, if I remember rightly, a league's travel will conduct us safely through these mountain passes. Is it not so?"

This question was addressed by the Captain of the traders to the guide who rode beside him.

"There would be danger enough, were the brigand Marani at large; but, thanks to the Virgin, his race is nearly run, for yonder vagabond, who is talking with Captain Guzman, tells me that the soldiers have at last captured the outlaw. Nevertheless, I shall not feel safe till we are through Murillo's valley." Here the muleteer crossed himself devoutly.

"But, surely, there's little danger of a brigand attacking so well armed and numerous a company as ours," returned the merchant, "were he even assisted by Satan himself."

"Hush, Señor Gonsalvo," exclaimed the guide, hurriedly, laying his hand upon his companion's arm. "Among these mountains, the least said about Satan the better. If rumor speaks truth, the 'Outlaw's Mount' is rented from the Evil One himself."

The guide paused as he entered the gloomy pass, and cast his eyes forward to the opposite acclivity.

"Never," said he solemnly, "do I enter this gulch, but I seem to think the brigand is at my elbow."

Hardly had the words been spoken, when a loud, harsh laugh sounded from behind. The merchant Gonsalvo wheeled his horse, and beheld a sudden panic among the soldiers and muleteers. At the same instant the mountebank dashed from among them, and passed him with the rapidity of thought; then the report of a pistol was heard, and then the young lancer Captain fell dead from his saddle. The attack had commenced.

The old guide sprung from his horse in a moment. The merchant-leader followed his example, and, after falling back, the two endeavored to rally the soldiers, who, appalled at the suddenness of their Captain's fall, were about to plunge into a disorderly retreat.

"Into line, men! Stand to your posts!" cried the merchant, in a loud voice, as he reached the first rank.

"That villain who lately joined us," said the guide; "it was he, the treacherous spy, who has slain our poor Captain."

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"That villain who lately joined us," said the guide; "it was he, the treacherous spy, who has slain our poor Captain."

As he spoke, a dozen brigands sprung from the mountain gorge, led by the spy, still riding his mustang. The old guide uttered a cry, as he recognized this man, and, drawing a pistol, leveled it at his head.

But the robber flung himself from the mustang, and, with a rapid movement divesting himself of the yellow blanket and ragged habiliments which had constituted his bodily disguise, appeared at once clothed in full brigand costume. The crooked mouth and burly beard had previously disappeared, and in its place appeared a face of striking but fierce beauty. Had any thing been needed to augment the superstitious uneasiness of the guide, this transformation would have answered the purpose. No sooner had the face and form of the brigand become visible, than his pistol dropped from the guide's nerveless hand, and, shrieking aloud, "It is Marani!" he dashed precipitously to the rear.

"It is Marani!" was repeated by soldiers and muleteers; and the brigands, profiting by their dismay, rushed boldly forward. But Gonsalvo the merchant sprung into Marani's path, disputing his advance with a leveled carabine. A bullet buried itself into the brain of the robber Gomez, while Marani found himself in the grasp of the trader's iron arms, crushing his ribs together. With a yell he attempted to draw a knife, but to do this was impossible, for the merchant's grasp grew stronger with every struggle. Muttering a curse, he clutched Gonsalvo's throat, determined to maintain his hold until his foeman's breath should depart for ever.

Thus the two antagonists rolled together under the mules, until they reached an open space, illumined brightly by the moon, when a sudden effort on the part of the merchant enabled him to free his throat, and spring to his feet. Marani was not behind him, and almost instantly the two were again in conflict face to face.

But, in rising, the merchant's cap had fallen, and his broad forehead and marked features were prominently revealed in the moonlight. Marani, confronting them, appeared suddenly to recognize some fearful likeness in those calm lineaments. His color fled, his glance wandered, and then, with a hollow cry, he turned and retreated, murmuring, as he fled:

"'Tis he!—'tis the dead—arisen!"

The conflict was now becoming desperate on the side of those who defended the *conducta*. Only a few brave traders kept up the contest in defense of their private property. But at this juncture a new arrival changed the aspect of affairs.

Leaping from the upper road, and plunging, like a young lion into the *melée*, the majestic figure of Zumozin appeared on the scene. Behind him came Don Ferrardo Nunez, with Pomfret and Lorenzo, leading the soldiers and peons, with loud shouts. The brigands, who had believed their victory secure, were bewildered by this attack from an unlooked-for force; and before Marani—himself unmanned by this sudden terror—could control or direct his comrades, the entire band was in full flight before a rallying column of soldiers, peons and traders. The brigand chief saw himself again defeated, and as he turned to seek safety, he was met by the bright glance and armed hand of Lorenzo the artist, whose voice announced him to "Surrender!"

But Marani had no time to waste in combat. Dashing his slight antagonist aside, he leaped upon the old guide's mustang, which grazed by the roadside, and, striking his poniard in the animal's flank, rode hurriedly from the mountain pass. Lorenzo seized the bridle of Gonsalvo's horse, and dashed after the flying outlaw.

And then a wild race took place through the narrow pass-way, and down into Murillo's valley. The mustang bestridden by Marani, was one of great speed and strength, while the merchant's steed, bearing Lorenzo, was not inferior.

Thus sped the chase across the plain, and through the outskirts of Puebla. The few citizens who yet stirred in their dwellings heard the hoofs of flying horses; but ere they could define the figure of the first rider, the second dashed past and was lost in the distance.

Lorenzo, grasping a trooper's pistol, and bending on his steed's mane, grew excited almost to delirium as he galloped after the flying mustang, whose clattering hoofs guided him through the devious streets. Suddenly the hoof-beats ceased, and the pursuer, urging his horse, found himself turning the corner of an antique dwelling-house. He heard the mustang's gallop further off; but at the same instant his glance fell upon a figure crouching by the wayside. He checked his steed,

and, throwing himself from the saddle, encountered the subtle Marani, who aimed a poniard at his breast. The robber had resorted to one of the stratagems of his wild life, by dropping from the mustang, and permitting the animal to gallop away riderless, in order to mislead the pursuer to follow his clattering hoofs. But Lorenzo's quick eyes had caught the gleam of steel, and by a timely spring he eluded the dagger stroke, and, in another second, leveled his pistol at Marani.

"Robber! where is Inez Murillo?" demanded the artist, half choked with his emotion. Muttering an oath, Marani sprung upon Lorenzo, but the latter's finger was on the spring of his weapon. A sharp report startled the street, and Giacomo Marani, lifting his hand to his breast, staggered and sunk upon the curb. At the same moment lights flashed in the windows of the old mansion before the gate of which he had halted, and people began to gather from all parts.

"Ha! a murder!" cried one of the citizens, observing the fallen man and the youth who stood over him with a discharged pistol. "Unhappy youth, what have you done?"

"Tis Marani, the brigand!" murmured the artist; and the cry was taken up by a score of pallid citizens:

"Marani the brigand!"

And as the name of Marani was repeated, a woman's shriek sounded from a casement above. Then the door of the old house was flung open, giving passage to a female, who darted out, and sunk beside the bleeding brigand, lifting his head:

"Giacomo! Giacomo!—speak! It is I—'tis your Berta!"

The robber opened his eyes, now filmy with the approach of death. He recognized the girl, and his forehead drooped on her bosom.

"Berta?" he murmured—"Poor Berta!—they—have slain me—at last!"

"Oh Giacomo! Giacomo!"

"Berta!—kiss me!—listen!—you are—my—*daughter*!"—Berta!—pray—pray for your poor father—Giacomo!"

An expression of hopeless agony was stamped upon Berta's forehead, as she clasped Marani's neck and pressed her lips to his, receiving her *father's* last sigh. Lorenzo turned aside with shuddering sympathy, and encountered another vision. He saw the open door through which Berta had descended,

framing, as it were, the figure of a white-robed woman, who carried a silver lamp, whose rays revealed her pallid features. It was Inez Murillo; and Lorenzo, tottering forward, fell fainting at her feet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JUAN GARCIA IN MEXICO.

JUAN GARCIA, the alcalde, stood at the door of an ancient mansion in the City of Mexico, and, knocking at its outer portal, was admitted into the vestibule. To his low inquiry concerning the master of the house, an old servant answered by ushering him to an inner apartment, and to the presence of a man apparently of about sixty years, though but a few silver threads mingled as yet with the glossy black of his hair, and his forehead was smooth as a summer lake.

"Señor Garcia, be seated," said this person, waving his hand gracefully to the alcalde. "I was expecting you."

"I but a few hours since arrived in the city," answered the alcalde, "having been delayed upon the route."

"Was not a caravan attacked near Puebla?"

"So I have learned," replied Garcia, with a sudden and but ill-concealed trembling of his lips, which gave way at once to a careless expression. "The robbers in the mountains near my estate have been quite bold, of late. "But," he continued, changing the theme, "I believe your message, Don Lucas, intimated business of moment."

"You remind me, Señor Garcia. It was in regard to the young man—Anselmo—"

"And what about Anselmo, Don Lucas?" queried Garcia, showing his shining teeth.

"I confess, Juan, to have been somewhat troubled concerning this youth. He must be nearly of age."

"Don Lucas," responded Garcia, in a measured tone, "if I am not troubled about Anselmo Zumozin, trust me, *you* have no cause to be. As he has been, so will he remain."

"Ah ! if one could be sure of that !" rejoined the other. "But he has the old blood in his veins, you know ; and in these unquiet times there is no certainty that some powerful patron might not arise for him."

"Ay ! if the boy were master of himself or of a secret that concerns him !" said Garcia. "But you forget, Don Lucas, he is a serf, with a serf's ambition only—to eat, sleep, and escape labor. Trust me, had I thought him likely to annoy us, there were many methods—"

"Oh, truly, Garcia—you are this youth's master, and know his capacity. And, as you say, he is a serf, and in your power at all times. But should he learn—should he suspect—"

"What would you, Don Lucas?—that he be sent after his father?"

"No—no !" answered the other, hesitatingly—"I trust all to you, Juan. Our interests are one ; our lives depend on the safety of our secret. Nevertheless, it must be confessed, you have drawn largely—you have the lion's share of every thing, Juan."

"It is very true, Don Lucas, that I have my share of that which had been lost to both without my assistance. But you can not deny that I have earned all I claim. Pray, my dear Don Lucas, what would you have been without Juan Garcia?"

"It is very true ; you were my friend, Juan."

"I think so—since you, Don Lucas Guzman, could hardly have secured the reversion of Montagnone's estates, if the lawyer Garcia had not certified the deeds by his own testimony, as well as that of other credible witnesses."

"All of which was—"

"Skilfully fabricated, so that you, the administrator of Prince Montagnone's Mexican lands and mines, might establish a legal title to that vast property, and assume the guardianship of his infant son ; so that you, Lucas Guzman, faithful friend and steward of the Prince, might lay your plans for the future—"

"Juan ! there is no occasion to revert to—"

"Suffer me, Lucas—'tis my mood to-day. I wish to recall to your memory how Montagnone, inconsolable for the loss of his young wife—a pure-blooded daughter of the ancient Mexic race—departed for Europe, leaving you his adminis-

trador; how Lucas Guzman then took counsel with his friend, Juan Garcia; how the steel of our trusty friend, Giacomo Marani, insured to Montagnone a long rest in one of the Abruzzi passes; how the guardian of Montagnone's infant heir kept his precious charge so well that the child was never afterward heard of, and is probably at this time a serf on the lands of Juan Garcia."

"Juan, why do you rehearse all this?"

"Simply, Don Lucas, to remind you, what you sometimes seem to forget, that through Juan Garcia you enjoy your share of Montagnone's princely revenues, and that, for this reason, Juan Garcia has a right to take care of himself."

"I find no fault—I make no complaint!" cried the administrator, hastily. "Your schemes are always good—always successful, Juan. And now let us speak of other matters—of your niece, the Señorita Isabella—Isabella the queenly one!"

"You say well, Don Lucas," responded Garcia, with a gratified smile. "She is a queenly one, and may yet be—"

"A queen, perhaps."

"And why not, Don Lucas? You say my plans are always successful. Well, who knows, if Paredes shall prosper and Herrera succumb?—who knows whether Juan Garcia may not reach the second place in the State?"

"But you have said, ere this, that you look not for the perpetuity of this Republic."

"Nor do I desire it. Mexico must have a solid government again. These unquiet races can be ruled only with an iron scepter. We must have a government that will ensure your interest and mine."

"A monarchy!"

"Ay, Don Lucas! supported by the civil power, and controlling the army."

"Would you proclaim Don Mariano? I fear me he would soon meet the fate of our poor Yturbeide."

"And so would any other Mexican. No, Don Lucas, the ruler who must direct, with a strong hand, the energies of this nation, is a youth of royal birth, whose election to a Mexican throne, will be backed by European armies. Ere a year rolls round, such a ruler will be husband of my niece."

"What say you, Garcia?—husband of the Señorita Isabella?"

"Ay, Señor! Think you I play for *common* stakes? He who, through my aid, shall found a throne in Mexico, may well consent to mingle my blood with his dynasty."

"You are a daring man, Juan. I begin to have hopes of a monarchy. The Republic has had its day." Don Lucas arose, and took the alcalde's hand. "Let us ever be true to one another," said he.

"So shall we always be successful," answered Garcia, showing his teeth. Then, with smile and bow the confederates separated, Don Lucas resuming his arm-chair, the alcalde traversing the outer hall, and descending with rapid steps the wide stair-case of Guzman's mansion. But when he reached the lowest step, a hand touched his arm, and a voice said:

"Señor Garcia, I would fain speak with thee."

He turned and beheld Anselmo the Peon!

"Señor Garcia, it is Zumozin, your serf."

"And what brings thee here without permission, Anselmo?" demanded the alcalde, with assumed mildness.

"Señor Garcia, I seek Mexico, without permission, because I desire to learn more than I could learn from your cattle on the hills. I have been dreaming of my past life, and would unravel its mystery. Can my *master* assist me?"

"Anselmo!" said Garcia, agitated, in spite of his habitual control of emotion, by the singular demeanor of his dependent, "Anselmo, return to the *hacienda*, and you shall hear from me. There is a mystery in your life, and it is time, perhaps, you should learn what I alone can tell you. Go, therefore, good Anselmo, and await patiently my return to the estate, when, I promise you, all shall be made clear."

There was an expression in Garcia's eyes that indicated some hastily-formed resolution, boding no good to his Peon.

"Señor Garcia, I would have you reveal my father's name."

"Anselmo, this is neither the time nor place for revelations; nor is it proper that all should be disclosed at once. I know not what prompts this pertinacity on your part, or why you should fancy your ancestry different from that of a hundred of your companions."

Garcia still spoke in a mild, almost parental tone—his eyes, meanwhile, fixed upon Zumozin's face, as if to fathom his

thoughts. The Peon, standing with folded arms, seemed equally immobile, but met his master's gaze with a steady regard as he replied, in an even voice :

"Señor Garcia, in my childhood I was taught to look up to you as my superior and lord. I have eaten your bread, and given you the labor of my hands. This lot I shared, in common with my fellow-dependents, till I became more than a serf in tasting of the tree of knowledge. Padre Herrata, the teacher of your niece, discovered that Anselmo, the bond-slave, had a soul."

"Padre Herrata was an ingrate."

"I know, Señor, that, in permitting me to become his scholar, the priest incurred your displeasure ; I know that, when you bade me *destroy* my books, I spoke words of disrespect, for which you sorely punished me. Yet, Señor, I am grateful for the education bestowed on me through carelessness, while hundreds of my fellows grew up in blindness. I am grateful, Señor, that my spirit was taught to rebel against servitude, and to feel that chains degrade both body and mind. I am grateful that, in spite of his lowliness, the blood of a kingly race runs in the veins of Zumozin."

"Ah ! you have learned that—"

"Ay, Señor Garcia—*master*, as I have called you ! When, driving me forth upon the hills, you made me free, at least, to *think*, I demanded of myself why the boy Anselmo was less a slave than his fellows—why he escaped the lash, and breathed mountain air, while others toiled in field and mine. Then it was that an aged serf, who has long since gone to his rest, approached me and said, 'Zumozin, I ask thy blessing.' I demanded why he sought the benediction of a boy, and he laid his hand, in answer, upon my naked bosom. 'There,' said he, 'is the mark of all Zumozin's race—the print of a flowering cactus.' Señor, it was true ; I felt within me that the slave-boy's blood was of the current which once boiled in the fiery heart of Quahtzimozin."

The alcalde listened to his recital with a countenance apparently impassible ; but he experienced a relief at its close. It seemed evident that Anselmo remained still ignorant of aught concerning his father, though the knowledge he had obtained regarding his mother's ancestry was strictly true.

None knew better than Juan Garcia that the youth was noble in right of both his parents—since his father was an Italian grandee, and his mother an Indian princess, chosen to be Montagnone's bride out of all the dames of Spain's trans-Atlantic empire.

"There needs to be no revelation on my part, then, it seems," said the crafty lawyer, "since you already know what I intended to communicate."

"Señor Garcia," replied the Peon, ~~changing~~ neither his attitude nor the expression of his features, "till three days ago, I bore my chains with resignation, hoping for future freedom. But I am changed, Señor, for I have since grasped a soldier's blade and mingled in the strife of men."

"You, Anselmo?"

"I, Señor Garcia!" responded Zumozin, starting abruptly back with a passionate gesture. "'Twas I who led my comrades against the robber Marani. 'Twas I who saved the treasure of the State."

Garcia's assumed calmness vanished with this last sentence. The Peon's vehemence, his knowledge of the expedition, and, more than all, his asserted agency in defeating it, penetrated the alcalde with sudden apprehensions. He felt that this conduct of his serf was not the result of impulse, but of some settled purpose, and he divined at once that he had too long underrated Anselmo's character and abilities. Nevertheless, dissembling with habitual readiness, he responded:

"You will not shame your ancestry, Anselmo, nor your father's name. But, return, I pray you, to our hacienda. Ere a week shall pass, I swear that you shall learn all that concerns yourself."

"And if you break your oath to me, Señor," said the Peon, gravely, "may I demand an unravelment of this mystery from the lips of Don Lucas Guzman?"

Now, indeed, the alcalde's cheek became ashy, and his glance shifted in terror. Zumozin resumed in sterner accents:

"Juan Garcia! I demand my father's name!"

"You shall learn it," answered the alcalde, with unnatural calmness. "To-night—this hour, since you will it! Follow me, Anselmo Zumozin, and we will seek Don Lucas himself!"

With these words, Garcia turned, ascending the staircase

of Guzman's mansion. Zumozin followed him, and as the two disappeared within the building, two other figures emerged from beneath the balcony. These were Padre Herrata and the Yankee, Putnam Pomfret.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE REVELATION.

GUZMAN's door was opened by the administrador himself, whose features exhibited surprise at the alcalde's return, and the paleness of his countenance. But Garcia at once spoke.

"Don Lucas," he said, after noiselessly closing the door, "I bring hither a young man—a servant of mine—his name, Anselmo Zumozin." Guzman started, and grew pallid as his friend; but Garcia continued: "This young man is anxious to learn his father's name. I endeavored to dissuade him from penetrating family secrets, but his curiosity is insatiable. I shall, therefore, with your permission, proceed to satisfy it."

Uttering this, in a calm voice, Juan Garcia suddenly drew a pistol from under his vest, and discharged it at the Peon's bosom. Then, precipitating himself upon the young man, he bore him heavily to the floor. Don Lucas started back, appalled at the alcalde's desperate action. A dense smoke filled his eyes, and as it dispersed, he beheld the serf prostrate and bleeding, and Garcia's hand clasping his throat.

"Quick! your dagger, Don Lucas!" cried the alcalde, hoarsely. "I have him fast! Strike at once—to the heart!"

The administrador drew his poniard, and darted forward, while Garcia, forcing Zumozin's head to the floor, exposed his side to the deadly blow! But the weapon did not descend; for at that instant the oaken door leading from the corridor was dashed open, admitting Pomfret and Padre Herrata.

Putnam saw at a glance the position of affairs, and with a hurrah, threw himself upon Don Lucas, hurling him heavily against the alcalde, who released his hold of the Peon's throat. Garcia sprang to his feet, confronting the assailants;

but ere he could recover his thoughts, new actors appeared upon the scene. A file of soldiers entered quickly from the passage, and ranged themselves behind another person who now advanced. It was Herrera, the President of Mexico.

The alcalde and Don Lucas shrunk back, as they met the quiet but meaning gaze of the Republican chief; and the latter sought to conceal the dagger with which he had threatened the life of Zumozin. The serf, supported in the arms of Padre Herrata and the Yankee, was lifted to a couch. His wound, though bleeding freely, was not deep, and Pomfret quickly bound a soldier's scarf around his breast, stanching the dangerous flow.

Herrera first spoke.

"Juan Garcia," said he, "why have you sought the life of this young man?"

"He is my enemy, and sought mine," was the sullen response.

"And is he not likewise the son of your friend, the late Prince Montagnone? Answer me!"

"He is a peon, and the son of a peon," replied the alcalde. "Don Lucas Guzman here knows that. Montagnone's child died at an early age."

Padre Herrata here came forward, and confronted the alcalde.

"Juan Garcia," said he, "you remember me! Years ago, I drank wine and broke bread under your roof. You drove me from your house because I had presumed to teach Anselmo Zumozin more than a slave should know. Is it not true?"

The alcalde replied not, and the priest proceeded.

"I went forth, and traversed strange lands, and made new friends. Abroad, I learned that the Prince Montagnone, fighting against the Algerines, had been carried into captivity."

"It is false," interrupted Garcia. "He died in Italy."

"So it was thought," responded the priest, quietly. "The Prince was a captive in Morocco, but had left a son in Mexico, under guardianship of his friend, Don Lucas Guzman, to whom, likewise, he confided his property in trust for the heir. Señor Guzman, am I right?"

"All the world knows this," cried Juan Garcia. "Montagnone's will was proved in our courts. Don Lucas can produce --"

Padre Herrata folded his arms, and rejoined :

"I ask the Señor Guzman to produce that will."

Don Lucas looked at Garcia, who made a sign of assent. The administrador then stepped to a cabinet, near the window, and, pressing a spring, opened a private drawer. From this drawer he took a roll of parchment discoloured with age.

"Here is the will of Don Anselmo Montagnone," said he, "by which I am constituted sole executor of his estate—in trust for an infant child."

"That child—" began the padre.

"Died in infancy."

"And the estates—"

"By a codicil of this will, the estates passed to Montagnone's friend, Lucas Guzman."

"And by this title, Señor Guzman, you hold the property?"

"It was the decision of our court."

Padre Herrata flung the parchment from him, and raised his hand toward heaven.

"Señor Guzman!" cried he, "and you, Juan Garcia, I here accuse you both of defrauding the heir of Montagnone of his sire's possessions; of attempting to murder the Prince Montagnone, in Italy, by the hand of a hired bravo named Marani; of perjuring yourselves by falsely swearing to the death of Montagnone's child; of degrading that child to the position of serf; and finally, of forging a false codicil to that will, through which to obtain the estates, which, had Montagnone died without issue, would have reverted to the Republic."

The priest, as he spoke these words in solemn voice, turned to Herrera, who, at their close, motioned to the soldiers behind him. They advanced toward Don Lucas and the alcalde, but the latter sprung forward.

"Why should this mad priest's assertions weigh against the law?" cried he. "This will was proved—"

"But Montagnone's death is not proved," said the priest.

"It is a lie," cried the alcalde, struggling with the soldiers who now restrained him. "'Tis all a vile collusion in these men. Your Excellency knows well that—"

"The will was proved," here broke in Don Lucas. "Montagnone, my noble friend, is long since dead—"

At this moment, the door of the apartment was again opened,

giving entrance to Don Ferrardo Nunez, and the merchant Gonsalvo. These two advanced to the middle of the floor, the latter pausing opposite Guzman.

"What said Don Lucas?" asked the merchant. "That his friend Montagnone was dead?"

Guzman uttered a loud cry, and fell senseless to the floor. The alcalde retreated before the merchant's gaze.

"In the devil's name, who are you?" he gasped.

"I am he who has more than once escaped the daggers of his good friends. I am—the Prince Montagnone!"

Juan Garcia saw that the game he had played during a lifetime was ended. He beheld his last chance cast away; for the man he had wronged, and believed dead, was now arisen to blast him. He glanced backward an instant over a long career of cunning and crime; he dared not look forward, for the defeat of all his schemes was there apparent, with ruin, beggary, and perhaps a shameful death. Juan Garcia's hardihood forsook him. His eyes fell beneath the gaze of his injured friend; but, as their glance rested on the floor, it caught the gleam of Guzman's dagger. The alcalde stooped suddenly, raised the naked blade, and drove it heavily into his breast.

CHAPTER XXV.

FATHER AND SON

THREE days elapsed after the suicide of Garcia. Rumors of approaching civic strife gathered strength. Provinces issued *pronunciamientos* against the administration, and a portion of the army under General Paredes declared open rebellion. All signs betokened a political change.

But the traders of the caravan, arriving safely, forgot their dangers in the quest of new gains. The authorities, rejoicing over the defeat of a famous robber-band, signified their content by condemning all prisoners to the garote.

In a house in Mexico were gathered several of the characters of our story. The merchant Gonsalvo, returned from

his long banishment in season to counteract the schemes of the treacherous alcalde, sat beside his recovered son, Anselmo Zumozin, the heir of Montagnone. Outside the apartment, upon a balcony, were the priest Herrata and Don Ferrardo Nunez, and at a little distance sat Pomfret.

Zumozin's face was pale, and the trace of pain yet lingered upon it. The merchant Gonsalvo's countenance was overshadowed with thought.

"Anselmo," he remarked, "you surely will not leave me. Must I again lose the son whom Heaven has vouchsafed in my declining years? Who will uphold the name of our ancestors? Who will inherit my recovered wealth?"

"Father, I covet neither wealth nor station. The reef mountain has been my home from childhood. Thither I return, and there, my father, I will welcome you."

"But, my son, there are duties to perform. Society and the State demand the assistance of such as you, Anselmo."

"Other duties, dearer far, call me to the scenes of my youth. I would do justice to the wronged—I would soothe the afflicted—I would redeem and exalt the race of my mother—the race of Zumozin."

Montagnone's eyes grew moist, as his thoughts went back to the time when the mother of Anselmo lay upon his bosom—his chosen bride, wildly loved, and never forgotten. He grasped his son's hand, and said, in the beautiful language of Holy Writ: "Whither thou goest, I will go."

The young man smiled gratefully, and half rising from the couch on which he reclined, beckoned to his friend Nunez.

"Ferrardo," said Zumozin, "we called one another by the dear name of 'brother' when I was a lonely serf, and you a cavalier. Ferrardo, are you not my brother still?"

"Till death, noble Anselmo," cried the young Captain, warmly. "What do I not owe to you?"

"Hear you, my father?" said Zumozin, turning to Montagnone. "Ferrardo Nunez, the son of a friend whom you once loved, is the brother of your son. He must wed the niece of Juan Garcia, and be happy. To him I resign the wealth of Garcia, which is now ours. Shall it not be so, my father?"

"As it pleases you, my son Anselmo."

"No, no, it must not be," exclaimed Ferrardo. "I can not

thus abuse your friendship. My own arm shall win me fortune, supported by the love of Isabella."

"The love of Isabella!" Those words called the blood into Zumozin's cheeks. But he pressed the hand of his friend.

"Ferrardo," he said, "you promised to be my brother. As a brother, then, I require you to gratify me in this thing."

The melancholy eyes of Anselmo sought the flushed face of his friend with a pleading expression. Don Ferrardo could not resist their appeal. He threw his arms around Zumozin's neck.

"My brother—my noble brother! May God reward you!"

"Wall, ef that 'ere Ingen Zumozin ain't the most generous individual I ever seen, then thar' ain't no mean critters in creation," was the remark of Pomfret to Padre Herrata, in witnessing this scene. "Jerusalem!" he continued, brushing away a tear with his coat-sleeve, "he don't think any more o' givin' away fortins than I'd think o' selling a clock!"

"He is a true friend; God bless him!" murmured the Padre Herrata.

The capture of Marani, the brigand, and the dispersion of his band, relieved the valley of Murillo from its dangerous neighbors of the "Outlaw's Mount." And it was not long before the lovely Inez, restored to her father's arms, beheld once more the gardens blooming around a new mansion, where, unchecked by the dread of robbers, she could listen, well pleased, to the thrumming of a light guitar touched by her lover-husband, the happy Lorenzo.

One alone, of all the band of Marani, was afterward seen in the valley of Murillo. This was the girl Berta, who survived the death of the brigand chief only to become deprived of reason. Her fate, however, was not a severe one, for the daughter of Murillo received and protected her, soothing her bewildered mind with friendly care.

It is unnecessary to dispose of the Yankee; for, with the pertinacity characteristic of his race, he will not be disposed of until his story of Knight-Errantry in Mexico is complete.

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